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YOUNG MUSGRAVE

607064

BY
MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF "THE CURATE IN CHARGE," ETC.

"No man can redeem his brother."—Ps. xlix. 7



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MACMILLAN AND CO.
1883

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YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY.

It would be difficult to say how Penninghame Castle had got that imposing name. It was an old house standing almost on the roadside, at least at the termination of a rough country road leading from the village, which widened into a square space at the side of the house. The village road was lined with trees, and it pleased the Musgraves to believe that it had been in happier days the avenue to their ancient dwelling, while the rough square at the end had been the courtyard. The place itself consisted of a small mansion not important enough to be very distinctive in architecture, built on to the end of an old hall, the only remaining portion of a much older and greater house. This hall was entered directly by a great door of heavy oak, from which a slope of ancient causeway descended into the road below—an entrance which was the only thing like a castle in the whole *ensemble*, though it ought to have led to an ancient gateway and portcullis rather than to the great door generally wide open, through which, according to the story, a horseman once entered to scare the guests at their feast and defy the master at the head of the table. The hall was not used for such festive purposes now, nor threatened by such warlike intruders. It had known evil fortune in its day and had been degraded into a barn, its windows blocked up, its decorations destroyed—but had come

to life again for the last fifty years and had come back to human use, though no longer as of old. Round the corner was the front of the old mansion, built in that pallid grey stone, which adds a sentiment of age, like the ashy paleness of very old people, to the robust antiquity of mason-work more lasting than any that is done now. Successive squires had nibbled at this old front, making windows there and doorways here : windows which cut through the string-courses above, and a prim Georgian front door, not even in the centre of the old arched entrance which had been filled up, which gave a certain air of disreputable irregularity to the pale and stern old dwelling-place. Ivy and other clinging growths fortunately hid a great deal of this, and added importance to the four great stacks of chimneys, which, mantled in its short, large leaves and perpetual greenness, looked like turrets, and dignified the house. A lake behind somewhat coldly blue, and a great hill in front somewhat coldly green, showed all the features of that north country which was not far enough north for the wild vigour and vivifying tints of brown bracken and heather. The lake came closely up in a little bay behind the older part of the house where there was a rocky harbour for the boats of the family ; and between this little bay and the grey walls was the flower-garden, old-fashioned and bright, though turned to the unkindly east. Beyond this was a kind of broken park with some fine trees and a great deal of rough underwood, which stretched along the further shore of the lake and gave an air of dignity to the dwelling on that side. This was still called "the Chase" as the house was called the Castle, in memory it might be supposed of better days. The Musgraves had been Cavaliers, and had wasted their substance in favour of the Charleses, and their lands had been ravaged, their park broken up into fields, their avenue made a common road, half by hostile neighbours, half by vulgar intrusion, in the days when the Revolutionists had the upper hand. So they said, at least, and pleas of this kind are respected generally, save by the very cynical. Certainly the present occupants of the house believed it fervently, and so did the village ; and if it was nothing more it was a great comfort and support to the family, and made them regard the rude approach to "the Castle" with

forbearance The public right of way had been established in those stormy times. It was a sign even of the old greatness of the house. It was better than trim lawns and smiling gardens, which would have required a great deal of keeping up. It was, however, a family understanding that the first Musgrave who made a rich marriage, or who in any other way became a favourite of Fortune, should by some vague means—an act of parliament or otherwise—reclaim the old courtyard and avenue, and plant a pair of magnificent gates between the castle and the village : also buy back all the old property ; also revive the title of Baron of Penninghame, which had been in abeyance for the last two hundred years ; and do many other things to glorify and elevate the family to its pristine position ; and no Musgrave doubted that this deliverer would come sooner or later, which took the bitterness out of their patience in the meantime and gave them courage to wait.

Another encouraging circumstance in their lot was that they were fully acknowledged as the oldest family in the county. Other and richer persons pushed in before them to its dignities, and they were no doubt very much left out of its gaieties and pleasures ; but no one doubted that they had a right to take the lead, if ever they were rich enough. This, however, did not seem likely, for the moment at least. The family at Penninghame had, what is much to be avoided by families which would be happy, a history, and a very recent one. There were two sons, but neither of them had been seen at the Castle for nearly fifteen years, and with the name of the elder of these there was connected a dark and painful story, not much known to the new generation, but very well remembered by all the middle-aged people in the county. Young Musgrave had been for a year or two the most popular young squire in the north country, but his brightness had ended in dismal clouds of misfortune and trouble and bloodshedding, with perhaps crime involved, and certainly many of the penalties of crime. He had not been seen in the north country since the crisis which made all the world acquainted with his unfortunate name ; and his younger brother had reappeared but once in their father's house, which was thus left desolate, except for the one daughter, who had

been its delight before and was now its only stay. So far as the county knew, young Musgrave still lived, though he was never mentioned, for there had been no signs of mourning in the house, such as must have intimated to the neighbours the fact of John's death—which also of course would have made Randolph the heir. And save that once, not even Randolph had ever come to break the monotony of life in his father's house. Squire Musgrave and his daughter lived there alone now. They had been alone these fifteen years. They had little society, and did not keep up a large establishment. He was old, and she was no longer young enough to care for the gaieties of the rural neighbourhood. Thus they had fallen out of the current of affairs. The family was "much respected," but comparatively little heard of after the undesired and undesirable notoriety it had once gained.

Thus abandoned by its sons, and denuded of the strongest elements of life, it may well be supposed that the castle at Penninghame was a melancholy house. What more easy than to conjure up the saddest picture of such a dwelling? The old man, seated in his desolate home, brooding over perhaps the sins of his sons, perhaps his own—some injudicious indulgence, or untimely severity which had driven them from him; while the sister, worn out by the monotony of her solitary life, shut herself out from all society, and spent her life in longing for the absent, and pleading for them—a sad, solitary woman, with no pleasure in her lot, except that of the past. The picture would have been as appropriate as touching, but it would not have been true. Old Mr. Musgrave was not the erring father of romance. He was a well-preserved and spare little man, over seventy, with cheeks of streaky red like winter apples, and white hair, which he wore rather long, falling on the velvet collar of his old-fashioned coat. He had been an outdoor man in his day, and had farmed, and shot, and hunted, like others of his kind, so far as his straitened means and limited stables permitted; but when years and circumstances had impaired his activity he had been strong enough to retire, of his own free will, while graceful

was still in his power. He spent most of his time in his library, with only a constitutional walk, or easy

ramble upon his steady old cob, to vary his life, except when quarter sessions called him forth, or any other duty of the magistracy, to which he still paid the most conscientious attention. The Musgraves were not people whom it was easy to crush, and Fate had a hard bargain in the old squire, who found himself one occupation when deprived of another with a spirit not often existing in old age. He had committed plenty of mistakes in his day, and some which had been followed by tragical consequences, a practical demonstration of evil which fortunately does not attend all the errors of life ; but he did not brood over them in his old library, nor indulge unavailing compunctions, nor consider himself under any doom ; but on the contrary studied his favourite problems in genealogy and heraldry, and county history, and corresponded with *Notes and Queries*, and was in his way very comfortable. He it was who first pointed out that doubtful blazoning of Marmion's shield, "colour upon colour," which raised so lively a discussion ; and in questions of this kind he was an authority, and thoroughly enjoyed the little tilts and controversies involved, many of which were as warm as their subjects were insignificant. His family was dropping, or rather had dropped, into decay ; his eldest son was virtually lost to his family and to society ; his youngest son alienated and a stranger ; and some of this at least was the father's fault. But neither the decay of the house, nor the reflection that he was at least partially to blame, made any great difference to the squire. There had no doubt been moments, and even hours, when he had felt it bitterly ; but these moments, though perhaps they count for more than years in a man's life, do not certainly last so long, and age has a way of counterfeiting virtue, which is generally very successful, even to its personal consciousness. Mr. Musgrave was generally respected, and he felt himself to be entirely respectable. He sat in his library and worked away among his county histories, without either compunction or regret—who could throw a stone at him ? He had been rather unfortunate in his family, that was all that could be said.

And Mary Musgrave, his daughter, was just as little disposed to brood upon the past. She had shed many tears in her day,

and suffered many things. Perhaps it was in consequence of the family troubles which had come upon her just at the turning-point in her life that she had never married ; for she had been one of the beauties of the district—courted and admired by everybody, and wooed by many : by some who indeed still found her beautiful, and by some who had learned to laugh at the old unhappiness of which she was the cause. Miss Musgrave did not like these last, which was perhaps natural ; and even now there would be a tone of satire in her voice when she noted the late marriage of one or another of her old adorers. Women do not like men whose hearts they have broken, to get quite healed, and console themselves ; this is perhaps a poor feeling, but it is instinctive, and though it may be stoutly struggled against in some cases, and chidden into silence in many, it still maintains an untolerated yet obstinate life. But neither the failure of the adorations she once inspired nor the family misfortunes had crushed her spirit. She lived a not unhappy life, notwithstanding all that had happened. It was she who did everything that was done at Penninghame. The reins which her father had dropped almost unawares she had taken up. She managed the estate ; kept the bailiff in order ; did all business that was necessary with the lawyer ; and what was a greater feat still, kept her father unaware of the almost absolute authority which she exercised in his affairs. It had to be done, and she had not hesitated to do it ; and on the whole, she, too, though she had suffered many heartaches in her day, was not unhappy now, but lived a life full of activity and occupation. She was forty, and her hair began to be touched by grey—she who had been one of the fairest flowers of the north country. A woman always has to come down from that eminence somehow ; whether she does it by becoming some one's wife or by merely falling back into the silence of the past and leaving the place free for others, does not much matter. Perhaps, indeed, it is the old maid who has the best of it. A little romance continues to encircle her in the eyes of most of those who have worshipped her youth. She has not married ; why has she not married—that once admired of all admirers ? Has it been that she, too, sharing the lot which she inflicted on so many, was not loved where she loved ? or was it

perhaps that she had made a mistake—sent away some one, perhaps, who knows, the very man who thought of her thus kindly and regretfully—whom she was afterwards sorry to have sent away? Nobody said this in words, but Mary Musgrave at forty was more tenderly thought of than Lady Stanton, who had been the rival queen of the county. Lady Stanton was stout now-a-days; in men's minds, when they met her sailing into a ball-room, prematurely induced with the duties of chaperon to her husband's grown-up daughters, there would arise a half-amused wonder how they could have worshipped at her feet as they once did. “Can this muckle wife be my true love Jean?” they said to themselves. But Miss Musgrave, who was slim as a girl in her unwedded obscurity, and whose eyes some people thought as bright as ever, though her hair was grey, gave rise to no such irreverent thoughts. There were men scattered through the world who had a romantic regard, a profound respect still, for this woman whom they had loved, and who had preserved the distinction of loving no one in return. Nobody had died for love of her, though some had threatened it; but this visionary atmosphere of past adoration supplied a delicate homage, such as is agreeable even to an old maiden's heart.

And Miss Musgrave's life was spent chiefly in the old hall, as her father's was spent in his library. She had been full of gay activity in her youth, a bold and graceful horsewoman, ready for anything that was going; but, with the same sense of fitness that led the squire to his retirement, she too had retired. She had put aside her riding-habits along with her muslins, and wore nothing but rich neutral-tinted silk gowns. Her only extravagance was a pair of ponies, which she drove into the county town when she had business to do, or to pay an occasional visit to her friends: but by far the greater part of her life was spent in the old hall, where all her favourites and allies came, and all her poor people from the village, who found her seated like a scriptural potentate in the gate, ready to settle all quarrels and administer impartial justice. The hall was connected with the house by a short passage and two doors, which shut out all interchange of sound. There was nothing above it but the high-pitched roof, the turret chimneys, and the ivy, nor was any

interposition of servants necessary to usher in visitors by that ever-open way. This was a thing which deeply affected the spirits and feelings of Eastwood, the only male functionary in the house—the most irreproachable of butlers. A door which opened straight into the lady's favourite sitting-room was felt by him to be an insult to the family ; it was more like a farmhouse than a castle ; and as for Miss Musgrave, she was just as bad—too affable, a deal too affable, talking to any one that came to her, the tramps on the road as well as the ladies and gentlemen whose unwilling steeds pranced and curveted on the old slope of causeway. This was a standing grievance to the butler, whose complaint was that the “prestedge” of the family was in hourly jeopardy ; and his persistent complaint had thrown a shade of dissatisfaction over the household. This, however, did not move the lady of the house. Eastwood and the rest did not know, though some other people did, that it was the proudest woman in the county whom they accused of being too affable, and who received all the world in the old hall without the assistance of any gentleman usher. There were no windows in the side of the hall which fronted the road, but only this huge oaken door, all studded with bars and elaborate hinges of iron. On the other side there was a recess, with a large square window and cushioned seats, “restored” by village workmen in a not very perfect way, but still preserving the ample and noble lines of its original design. This windowed recess was higher than the rest of the hall, the walls of which were low, though the roof was lofty. But towards the front the only light was from the doorway, which looked due west, and beheld all the sunsets, flooding the ancient place with afternoon light and glories of evening colour. The slanting light seemed to sweep in like an actual visitor in all its sheen of crimson and purple, when the rest of the house was in the still and hush of the grey evening. This was where Miss Musgrave held her throne.

Thus Penninghame Castle stood at the moment this story begins. The lake gleaming cold towards the north, rippling against the pebbles in the little inlet which held the two boats, the broken ground and ancient trees of the Chase, lying eastward, getting the early lights of the morning, as did the flower-garden,

which lay bright under the old walls. A little genial hum of the kindly north-country women-servants, who had been there for a lifetime, or who were the daughters and cousins of those who had been there for a lifetime, with Eastwood strutting important among them—the one big cock among this barndoors company—made itself audible now and then, a respectful subdued human accompaniment to the ripple of the lake and the whispering of the wind among the trees: and now and then a cheerful cackle of poultry, the sound of the ponies in the stable, or the squire's respectable cob: the heavy steps of the gardener walking slowly along the gravel paths. But for these tranquil sounds, which made the stillness more still, there was nothing but quiet in and about the old house. There had been a time when much had happened there, when there had been angry dissensions, family convulsions, storms of mutual reproach and reproof, outbursts of tears and crying. But all that was over. Nothing had happened at Penninghame for fifteen years. The old squire in his library and Mary in her favourite old chamber lived as though there were no breaks in life, no anguishes, no convulsions, as quietly as their trees, as steadily as their old walls, as if existence could neither change nor end. Thus they went on from day to day and from year to year, in a routine which occupied and satisfied, and kept the sense of living in their minds, but in a lull and hush of all adventure, of all commotion, of all excitement. Time passed over them and left no trace, save those touches imperceptible at the moment which sorrow or passion could surpass in effect in one day, yet which tell as surely at the end. This was how things were at Penninghame when this story begins.

CHAPTER II.

MARY.

It was not one of Mary Musgrave's fancies to furnish her hall like a drawing-room. She had collected round her a few things for use, but she was not rich enough to make her favourite place into a toy, as so many people do, nor had she the opportunity of "picking up" rarities to ornament it, as she might have liked to do had she been in the way of them. The room had been a barn fifty years before. Then it became a family storeroom, was fitted up at one end with closets and cupboards, and held the household linen, and sometimes the winter supply of fruit. It was Mary who had rescued it back again to gentler use ; but she had not been able to re-decorate or renew it with such careful pretence at antiquity as is common nowadays. All that she could do for it was to collect her own doings there, and all the implements for her work. The windowed recess which got the morning sun was her business-room. There stood an old secretaire, chosen not because of its age or suitability, but because it was the only thing she had available, a necessity which often confers as much grace as the happiest choice. Opposite the doorway was an old buffet, rough, yet not uncharacteristic, which had been scrubbed clean by a generous housemaid when Miss Musgrave first took to the hall. And much it had wanted that cleansing ; but the soap and the water and the scrubbing-brush had not agreed very well, it must be allowed, with the carved mahogany, which ought to have been oak. Between the open door and this big piece of furniture was a square of old Turkey carpet, very much faded, yet still agreeable to the eye, and a spindle-legged table of Queen Anne's days, with drawers which held Miss Musgrave's knitting and a book, and sometimes homelier matters, mendings which she chose to do herself, calculations which were not meant for the common eye.

She was seated here, on an afternoon of October, warm with the shining of that second summer which comes even in the north. The sunshine came so far into the room that it caught

the edges of the carpet, and made a false show of gold upon the faded wool ; and it was so warm that Miss Musgrave had drawn her chair farther into the room than usual, and sat in the shade to escape the unusual warmth. At this moment she was not doing anything. She was sitting quite silent, the book she had been reading laid open upon her knee, enjoying the sun, as people enjoy it to whom it suddenly reveals itself after date when it is past expectation. In the end of October in the north country, people have ceased to think of warmth out of doors, or any blaze of kindly light from the skies—and the morning had been grey though very mild. The sudden glow had caught Mary as she sat, a little chilly, close to her opened door, thinking of a shawl, and had transfigured the landscape and the heavens and her own sentiments all at once. She was sitting with her hands in her lap, and the open book on her knee, thinking of it, surprised by the sweetness of it, feeling it penetrate into her very heart, though she had drawn her chair back out of the sun. No, not thinking—people do not think of the sunshine ; but it went into her heart, bringing back a confused sweetness of recollection and of anticipation—or rather of the anticipations which were recollections—which had ceased to exist except in memory. Just so does youth expect some sudden sweetness to invade its life ; and sometimes the memory of that expectation, even when unfulfilled, brings a half sad, half sweet amusement to the solitary. It was so with this lady seated alone in her old hall. She was Mary again, the young daughter of the house ; and at the same time she was old Miss Musgrave smiling at herself.

But as she did so a footstep sounded on the rough pavement of the ascent. No one could come unheard to her retreat, which was a safeguard. She gave a little shake to her head, and took up the open book, which was no old favourite to be dreamed over, but a modern book ; and prepared herself for a visitor with that smoothing of the brow and closing up of mental windows which fits us to meet strange eyes. “It is only I,” said the familiar voice of some one who knew and understood this slight movement : and then she dropped the book again, and let the smile come back into her eyes.

"Only you! then I may look as I please. I need not put on my company garb," she said, with a smile.

"I should hope not," said the new-comer, reaching the door with that slight quickening of the breath which showed that even the half-dozen steps of ascent was a slight tax upon him. He did not even shake hands with her—probably they had met before that day—but took off his hat as he crossed the threshold, as if he had been going into a church. He was a clergyman, slim and slight, of middle size, or less than middle size, in somewhat rusty grey, with a mildness of aspect which did not promise much strength, bodily or mental. The Vicarage of Penninghame was a poor one, too poor to be worth reserving for a son of the family, and it had been given to the tutor of Mr. Musgrave's sons twenty years ago. What had happened was natural enough, and might be seen in his eyes still, notwithstanding lapse of time and change of circumstances. Mr. Pennithorne had fallen in love, always hopelessly and mildly, as became his character, with the Squire's daughter. He had always said it did not matter. He had no more hope of persuading her to love him than of getting the moon to come out of heaven, and circumstances having set marriage before him, he had married, and was happy enough as happiness goes. And he was the friend, and in a measure the confidant, of this lady whom he had loved in the superlative poetical way—knew all about her, shared her life in a manner, was acquainted with many of her thoughts and her troubles. A different light came into his eyes when he saw her, but he was not at all unhappy. He had a good wife and three nice children, and the kind of life he liked. At fifty, who is there who continues to revel in the unspeakable blisses of youth? Mr. Pennithorne was very well content: but still when he saw Mary Musgrave—and he saw her daily—there came a different kind of light into his eyes.

"I was in mental *déshabille*," she said, "and did not care to be caught; though after all it is not everybody who can see when one is not clothed and in one's right mind."

"I never knew you out of your right mind, Miss Mary. What was it?—no new trouble?"

"You are always a flatterer, Mr. Pen. You have seen me in

all kinds of conditions. No, we don't have any troubles now. Is that a rash speech? But really I mean it. My father is in very good health and enjoys himself, and I enjoy myself—in reason."

" You enjoy yourself! Yes, in the way of being good to other people."

" Hush!" she said, putting up her hand to stop him in his little speech, sincere as it was. " Shall I tell you what it was that put me out of order for any one's eyes but an old friend's? Nothing more than this sunshine, Mr. Pen. Don't you recollect when we were young how a sudden thought of something that was coming would seize upon you, and flood you with delight—as the sun did just now?"

" I recollect," he said, fixing his mild eyes upon her, and shaking his head, with a sigh : " but it never came."

" That may be true enough; but the thought came, and 'life is but thought,' you know; the thing might not follow. However, we are all quite happy all the same."

He looked at her, still shaking his head.

" I suppose so," he said ; " I suppose so ; quite happy ! but not as we meant to be ; that was what you were thinking."

" I did not go so far. I was not thinking at all. I *think* that I think very seldom. It only caught me as the old thought used to do, and brought so many things back."

She smiled, but he sighed.

" Yes, everything is very different. Yourself—to see you here, offering up your life for others—making a sacrifice——"

" I have made no sacrifice," she said, somewhat proudly, then laughed. " Is that because I am unmarried, Mr. Pen? You wedded people, you are so sure of being better off than we are. You are too complacent. But *I* am not so sure of that."

He did not join in her laugh, but looked at her with melting eyes—eyes in which there was some suspicion of tears. It was perhaps a trifle unkind of her to call him complacent in his conjugality. There were a hundred unspeakable things in his look—pity, reverence, devotion, not the old love perhaps, but something higher ; something that was never to end.

"On the whole, we are taking it too seriously," she said, after a pause. "It is over now, and the sun is going down. And you came to talk to me?—perhaps of something in the parish that wants looking to?"

"No—I came in only to look at you, and make sure that you were well. The children you were visiting the other day have the scarlet fever; and besides, I have had a feeling in my mind about you—a presentiment. I should not have been surprised to hear that there had been—letters—or some kind of advances made—"

"From whom?"

"Well," he said, after a slight pause; "they are both brothers—both sons—but they are not the same to me, Miss Mary. From John; he has been so much in my mind these two or three days, I have got to dreaming about him. Yes, yes, I know that is not worth thinking of; but we were always in such sympathy, he and I. Don't you believe in some communication between minds that were closely allied? I do. It is a superstition if you like. Nothing could happen to any of you but, if I were at ever so great a distance, I should know."

"Don't be too sure of that, Mr. Pen. Sometimes the dearest to us perish, and we know nothing of it; but I prefer your view. You dreamt of poor John? What did you see? Alas! dreams are the only ways of divining anything about him now!"

"And your father is as determined as ever?"

"We never speak on the subject. It has disappeared like so many other things. Why continue a fruitless discussion which only embittered him and wore me out? If any critical moment should come, if—one must say it plainly—my father should be like to die—then I should speak, you need not fear."

"I never feared that you would do everything the best sister, the bravest friend, could do."

"Do not praise me too much. I tell you I am doing nothing, and have done nothing for years; and sometimes it strikes me with terror. If anything should happen suddenly! My father is an old man; but talking to him now is of no use; we must risk it. What did you see in your dream?"

"Oh, you will laugh at me," he said with a nervous flutter;

"nothing—except that he was here. I dreamt of him before, that time that he came home—after——"

"Don't speak of it," said Miss Musgrave, with a corresponding shiver. "To think that such things should happen, and be forgotten, and we should all go on so comfortably—quite comfortably! I have nothing particular to make me happy, and yet I am as happy as most people—notwithstanding all that I have come through, as the poor women say."

"That is because you are so unselfish—so——"

"Insensible—more like. I am the same as other people. What the poor folk in the village come through, Mr. Pen!—loss of husbands, loss of children, one after another, grinding poverty, and want, and anxiety, and separation from all they care for. Is it insensibility? I never can tell; and especially now when I share it myself. I am as happy sometimes as when I was young. That sunshine gave me a ridiculous pleasure. What right have I to feel my heart light?—but I did somehow—and I do often—notwithstanding all that has happened, and all that I have 'gone through.' "

Mr. Pennithorne gave a vague smile, but he made no reply; for either she was accusing herself unjustly, or this was a mood of mind which perhaps derogated a little from Mary Musgrave's perfection. He had a way himself of keeping on steadfastly on the one string of his anxiety, whatever it might be, and worrying everybody with it—and here he lost the object of his faithful worship. It might—nay, must—be right since so she felt; but he lost her here.

"And speaking of happiness," she went on after a pause, "I want the children to come with me to Pennington to see the archery. It is pretty, and they will like it. And they like to drive behind my ponies. They are quite well?—and Emily?"

"Very well. Our cow has been ill, and she has been worrying about it—not much to worry about you will say, you who have so much more serious anxieties."

"Not at all. If I had a delicate child and wanted the milk, I should fret very much. Will you send up for some of ours? As usually happens, we, who don't consume very much, have plenty."

"Thank you," he said, "but you must not think that little Emmy is so delicate. She has not much colour—neither has her mother, you know." He was a very anxious father, and looked up with an eager wistfulness into her face. Little Emmy was so delicate that it hurt him like a foreboding to hear her called so. He could not bear Miss Musgrave, whose word had authority, to give utterance to such a thought.

"I spoke hastily," she said; "I did not think of Emmy. She is ever so much stronger this year. As for paleness, I don't mind paleness in the least. She has such a very fair complexion, and she is twice as strong as last year."

"I am so glad you think so," he said, with the colour rising to his face. "That is true comfort—for eyes at a little distance are so much better than one's own."

"Yes, she is a great deal stronger," said Miss Musgrave, "but you must send down for the milk. I was pale too, don't you remember, when you came first? When I was fifteen."

"I remember—everything," he said; "even to the dress you wore. I bought my little Mary something like it when I was last in town. It was blue—how well I remember! But Mary will never be like you, though she is your godchild."

"She is a great deal better; she is like her mother," said Miss Musgrave promptly; and Johnny is like his father, the best possible distribution. You are happy with your children, Mr. Pen. I envy people their children, it is the only thing; though perhaps they would bore me if I had them always on my hands. You think not? Yes, I am almost sure they would bore me. We get a kind of fierce independence living alone. To be hampered by a little thing always wanting something—wanting attention and care—I don't think I should like it. But Emily was born for such cares. How well she looks with her baby in her arms—all was the old picture over again—the Madonna and the child."

"Poor Emily," he said, though why he could not have told, for Emily did not think herself poor. Mr. Pennithorne always felt a vague pity for his wife when he was with Miss Musgrave, as for a poor woman who had many excellent qualities, but was here thrown into the shade. He could not say any more. He

got up to go away, consoled and made comfortable he could not quite tell why. She was always sweet he said to himself as he went home. What she had said about being bored by children was a mere delusion, or perhaps a little conscious effort of self-deception, persuading herself that to have no children and to be independent was the best. What a wife she would have made ! What a mother ! he said this to himself quite impartially, knowing well that she never could have been wife for him, and feeling a pang at his heart for the happiness she had lost. Married life was not unmixed happiness always ; it had its difficulties, he knew. But if *she* had married it was not possible that she could have been otherwise than happy. With her there could have been no drawbacks. Mr. Pennithorne looked upon the question from a husband's point of view alone.

When he was gone, Miss Musgrave sat still without changing her place, at first with a smile, which gradually faded away from her face, like the last suffusion of the sunshine, which was going too. She smiled at her fast friend, to whom she knew, notwithstanding his legitimate affection for his Emily, she herself stood first of created beings. It was a folly, but it did not hurt him, she reflected with a faint amusement ; and Emily and the children, notwithstanding this sentiment, were first and foremost really in his heart. Poor Mr. Pen ! he had always been like this, mildly sentimental, offering up an uninterrupted gentle incense. But he was not in the least unhappy, though perhaps he liked by times to think that he was. Few people were really unhappy. By moments life was hard ; but the struggle itself made a kind of happiness, a strain of living which it was good to feel by times. This was her theory. Most people when they come to forty have some theory or another, some settled way of getting through their existence, and adapting themselves for it. Hers was this : that evil was very much less than good in every way, and that people suffered a great deal less than they gave themselves credit for. Life had its compensations, daily and hourly, she thought. Her own existence had no exciting source of joy in it, but how far it was from being unhappy ! Had she been unhappy she would have scoffed at herself. What ! so many things to enjoy, so many good and pleasant circumstances

around, and not happy! Would not that have been a disgrace to any woman? So she was apt to think Mr. Pennithorne extracted a certain cunning enjoyment from that vain love for herself which had been so visionary at all times, and which he persuaded himself had saddened his life. She thought it had been a harmless delusion; a secret advantage rather; something to fall back upon; a soft and visionary grievance of which he never wearied. And perhaps she was right. She sat looking after him with a smile on her face.

The sun had crept away from her open doorway as they had talked. It was stealing further and further off, withdrawing from the line of the road, from the village roofs, from the gleam of the lake—and like the sun her smile stole away, from her eyes first, and then from the lingering curves about her mouth. Why was it that he could think he felt some action upon him of John's mind in the far distance, while she felt none? No kind of presentiment or premonition had come to her. It must be foolishness she was sure—superstition; for if sympathy could thus communicate even a vague thrill of warning from one to another through the atmosphere of the mind, surely she was a more likely object to receive it than Mr. Pennithorne! John knew her,—could not doubt her, surely. Therefore to her, if to any one, this secret communication must have come. The smile disappeared altogether from her mouth as she entered upon this subject, and her whole face and eyes became grave and grey, like the dull coldness of the east, half-resentful of the sunset which still went on upon the other edge of the horizon, dispersing all those vain reflections to every quarter except that from which the sun rose. Could it be possible after all that John might trust Mr. Pennithorne with a more perfect confidence, as one unconnected and unconcerned with all that had passed, than he could give to herself? The thought, even though founded on such visionary grounds, hurt her a little; yet there was a kind of reason in it. He might think that she, always at her father's side, and able to influence him in so many ways, might have done more for her brother; whereas with Mr. Pennithorne, who could do nothing, the sentiment of trust would be unbroken. She sat thus idly making it out to herself, making

wondering casts of thought after her brother in the darkness of the unknown, as inch by inch the light stole out of the sky. It was not a fine sunset that night. The sun was yellow and mournful; long lines of cloud broke darkly upon his sinking, catching only sick reflections of the pale light beneath. At last he was all gone, except one streaming yellow sheaf of rays that seemed to strike against and barb themselves into the damp green outline of the hill.

Her eyes were upon this, watching that final display, which, somehow in the absorption of her thoughts, kept her from observing an object near at hand, an old hackney-coach from Pennington town—where there was a railway station—which came along the road, a black, slow, lumbering vehicle, making a dull roll of sound which might have been a country cart. It came nearer and nearer while Miss Musgrave watched the bundle of gold arrows flash into the hill-side and disappear. Her eyes were dazzled by them, and chilled by their sudden disappearance, which left all the landscape cold and wrapped in a greyness of sudden evening. Mary came to herself with a slight shiver and shock. And at that moment the dull roll of the cab ceased, and the thing stood revealed to her. She rose to her feet with a thrill of wonder and expectation. The hackney carriage had drawn up at the foot of the slope opposite to and beneath her. What was coming? Had Mr. Pennithorne been warned after all, while she had been left in darkness? Her heart seemed to leap into her throat, while she stood clasping her hands together to get some strength from them, and waiting for the revelation of this new thing, whatever it might be.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW-COMERS.

THE cab was loaded with two boxes on the roof, foreign trunks, of a different shape from those used at home ; and a woman's face, in a fantastic foreign head-dress, peered through the window. Who could this be ? Mary stood as if spell-bound, unable to make a movement. The driver, who was an ordinary cab-driver from Pennington, whose homely everydayness of appearance intensified the strangeness of the others, opened the door of the carriage, and lifted out, first a small boy, with a scared face and a finger in his mouth, who stared at the strange place, and the figures in the doorway, with a fixed gaze of panic, on the eve of tears. Then out came with a bound, as if pushed from behind as well as helped a little roughly by the cabman, the foreign woman, at whose dress the child clutched with a frightened cry. Then there was a pause, during which some one inside threw out a succession of wraps, small bags, and parcels ; and then there stepped forth, with a great shawl on one arm, and a basket almost as large as herself on the other, clearly the leading spirit of the party, a little girl who appeared to be about ten years old. " You will wait a moment, man, till we get the pay for you," said this little personage in a high-pitched voice, with a distinctness of enunciation which made it apparent that the language, though spoken with very little accent, was unfamiliar to her. Then she turned to the woman and said a few words much more rapidly, with as much aid of gesture as was compatible with the burdens. Mary felt herself look on at all this like a woman in a dream. What was it all—a dream or reality ? She felt incapable of movement, or rather too much interested in the curious scene which was going on before her, to think of movement or interference of any kind. When she had given her directions, whatever they were, the little girl turned round and faced the open door and the lady who had not moved. She gave these new circumstances a long, steady, investigating look. They were within a dozen yards of each

other, but the chatelaine stood still and said nothing, while the little invader inspected her, and prepared her assault. The child, who looked the impersonation of life and purpose between her helpless companion and the wondering stranger whom she confronted, was dark and pale, not like the fair English children to whom Mary Musgrave was accustomed. Her dark eyes seemed out of proportion to her small, colourless face, and gave it an eager look of precocious intelligence. Her features were small, her dark hair falling about her in half-curling masses, her head covered with a little velvet cap trimmed with fur, as unlike anything children wore in England at the time as the anxious meaning of her face was different from ordinary baby prettiness. She made a momentary pause—then put down the basket on the stones, threw the shawl on the top of it, and mounted the breach with resolute courage. The stones were rough to the little child's feet; there was a dilation in her eyes that looked like coming tears, and as she faced the alarming stranger, who stood there looking at her, a burning red flush came momentarily over her face. But she neither sat down and cried as she would have liked to do, nor ran back again to cling to the nurse's skirts like her little brother. The small thing had a duty to do, and did it with a courage which might have put heroes to shame. Resolutely she toiled her way up to Miss Musgrave at the open door.

"Are you—Mary?" she said; the little voice was strange yet sweet, with its distinct pronunciation and unfamiliar accent. "Are you—Mary?" Her big eyes seemed to search the lady all over, making a rapid comparison with some description she had received. There was doubt in her tone when she repeated the name a second time, and the tears visibly came nearer, and got with a shake and tremor into her voice.

"What do you want with Mary?" said Miss Musgrave; "who are you, little girl?"

"I do not think you can be Mary," said the child. "He said your hair was like Nello's, but it is more like his own. And he said you were beautiful—so you are beautiful, but old—and he never said you were old. Oh, if you are not Mary, what shall we do? what shall we do?"

She clasped her little hands together, and for a moment trembled on the edge of a childish outburst, but stopped herself with a sudden curb of unmistakable will. "I must think what is to be done," she cried out sharply, putting her little hands upon her trembling mouth.

"Who are you? who are you?" cried Mary Musgrave, trembling in her turn; "child, who was it that sent you to me?"

The little thing kept her eyes fixed upon her, with that watchfulness which is the only defence of weakness, ready to fly like a little wild creature at any approach of danger. She opened a little bag which hung by her side and took a letter from it, never taking her great eyes all the time from Miss Musgrave's face. "This was for you, if you were Mary," she said; holding the letter jealously in both hands. "But he said, when I spoke to you, if it was you, you would know."

"You strange little girl!" cried Miss Musgrave, stepping out upon the stones and holding out her hands eagerly; but the child made a little move backward at the moment, in desperation of fear, yet courage.

"I will not give it you! I will not give it! it is everything we have—unless you are Mary," she cried, with the burst of a suppressed sob.

"Who are you then, child? Yes, I am Mary, Mary Musgrave—give me the letter. Is not this the house you were told of? Give me the letter—the letter!" said Miss Musgrave, once more holding out her hands.

And once more the child made her jealous mental comparison between what the lady was, and what she had been told to look for. "I cannot do what I please," she said, with little quivering lips. "I have Nello to take care of. He is only such a little, little child. Yes, it is the house he told me of; but he said if you were Mary—Ah! he said you would know us and take us into your arms, and be so kind, so kind!"

"Little girl," said Miss Musgrave, the tears dropping from her cheeks. "There is only one man's child that you can be. You are John's little girl, my brother John, and I am his sister Mary. But I do not know your name, nor any thing about

you. Give me John's letter—and come to me, come to me, my child!"

"I am Lilius," said the little girl; but she held back, still examining with curious though less terrified eyes. "You will give it me back if you are not Mary?" she went on, at length holding out the letter; but she took no notice of the invitation to come nearer, which Mary herself forgot in the eagerness of her anxiety to get the letter, the first communication from her brother—if it was from her brother—for so many years. She took it quickly, almost snatching it from the child's reluctant fingers, and leaning against the doorway in her agitation, tore it hastily open. Little Lilius was agitated too, with fear and desolate strangeness, and that terrible ignorance of any alternative between safety and utter destruction which makes danger insupportable to a child. What were they to do if their claims were not acknowledged? Wander into the woods and die in the darkness like the children in the story? Little Lilius had feared nothing till that first doubt had come over her at the door of the house, where, her father had instructed her, she was to be made so happy. But if they were not taken in and made happy, what were she and Nello to do? A terror of darkness, and cold, and starvation came upon the little girl. She would wrap the big shawl about her little brother, but what if wild beasts or robbers should come in the middle of the dark? Her little bosom swelled full, the sobs rose into her throat. Oh where could she go with Nello, if this was not Mary? But she restrained the sobs by a last effort, like a little hero. She sat down on the stone edge of the causeway, and held her hands clasped tight to keep herself together, and fixed her eyes upon the lady with the letter. The lady and the letter swam and changed, through the big tears that kept coming, but she never took those great dark, intense eyes from Miss Musgrave's face. The Italian nurse was bending over Nello, fully occupied in hushing his little plaints. Nello was tired, hungry, sleepy, cold. He had no responsibility upon him, poor little mite, to overcome the weakness of nature. He looked no more than six, though he was older, a small and delicate child; and he clung to his nurse, holding her desperately, afraid of he knew not what. She had plenty to do to take care

of him without thinking of what was going on above ; though the woman was indignant to be kept waiting, and cast fierce looks, in the intervals of petting Nello, upon the lady, the cold Englishwoman who was so long of taking the children to her arms. As for the cabman, emblem of the general unconcern which surrounds every individual drama, he stood leaning calmly upon his horse, waiting for the *dénouement*, whatever it might be. Miss Musgrave would see him paid one way or another, and this was the only thing for which he needed to care.

"Lilias," said Miss Musgrave, going hastily to the child, with tears running down her cheeks, "I am your aunt Mary, my darling, and you will soon learn to know me. Come and give me a kiss, and bring me your little brother. You are tired with your long journey, my poor child."

"No, no—I am not tired—only Nello; and he is h-hungry. Ah! Kiss Nello, Nello—come and kiss him; he is the baby. And are you Mary—real, real Mary?" cried the little girl, bursting out into sobs; "oh; I cannot h-help it. I did not mean it; I was fr-frightened. Nello, come, come, Mary is here."

"Yes, Mary is here," said Miss Musgrave, taking the child into her arms, who, even while she sobbed against her shoulder, put out an impatient little hand and beckoned, crying, "Nello! Nello!" But it was not so easy to extract Nello from his nurse's arms. He cried and clung all the faster from hearing his sister's outburst; their poor little hearts were full; and what chokings of vague misery, the fatigue and discomfort infinitely deepened by a dumb consciousness of loneliness, danger, and strangeness behind, were in these little inarticulate souls! something more desperate in its inability to understand what it feared, its dim anguish of uncomprehension, than anything that can be realized and fathomed. Mary signed eagerly to the nurse to bring the little boy indoors into the hall, which was not a reassuring place, vast and dark as it was, in the dimness of the evening, to a child. But she had too many difficulties on her hands in this strange crisis to think of that. She had the boxes brought in also, and hastily sent the carriage away, with a desperate sense as of burning her ships, and leaving no possible way to herself of escape from the difficulty. The gardener, who had appeared

*round the corner, attracted by the sound, presented himself as much out of curiosity as of goodwill to assist in carrying in the boxes, "though it would be handiest to drive round to the front door, and tak' them straight oop t' stair," he said, innocently enough. But when Miss Musgrave gave authoritative directions that they were to be brought into the hall, naturally the gardener was surprised. This was a proceeding entirely unheard of, and not to be understood in any way.

"It'll be a deal more trouble after," he said, under his breath, which did not matter much. But when he had obeyed his mistress's orders, he went round to the kitchen full of the new event. "There's something oop," the gardener said, delighted to bring so much excitement with him, and he gave a full account of the two pale little children, the foreign woman with skewers stuck in her hair, and finally, most wonderful of all, the boxes which he had deposited with his own hands on the floor of the hall. "I ken nothing about it," he said, "but them as has been longer aboot t' house than me could tell a deal if they pleased ; and Miss Brown, it's her as is wanted," he added leisurely at the end.

Miss Brown, who was Mary Musgrave's maid, and had been standing listening to his story with frequent contradictions and denials, in a state of general protestation, started at these words.

"You great gaby," she said, "why didn't you say so at first ?" and hurried out of the kitchen, not indisposed to get at the bottom of the matter. She had been Miss Musgrave's favourite attendant for twenty years, and in that time had, as may be supposed, known about many things which her superiors believed locked in the depths of their own bosoms. She could have written the private history of the family with less inaccuracy than belongs to most records of secret history. And she was naturally indignant that Tom Gardener, a poor talkative creature, who could keep nothing to himself, should have known this new and startling event sooner than she did. She hurried through the long passage from the kitchen, casting a stealthy glance in passing at the closed door of the library, where the Squire sat unconscious. A subdued delight was in the mind of the old servant ; certainly it is best when there are no mysteries

in a family, when all goes well—but it is not so amusing. A great event of which it was evident the squire was in ignorance, which probably would have to be kept from him, and as much as possible from the household—well, it might be unfortunate that such things should be, but it was exciting, it woke people up.

Miss Brown obeyed this summons with more genuine alacrity than she had felt for years.

Very different were the feelings of her mistress standing there in the dimness of the old hall, her frame thrilling and her heart aching with the appeal which her brother had made to her, out of a silence which for more than a dozen years had been unbroken as that of the grave. She could scarcely believe yet that she had seen his very handwriting and read words which came straight from him and were signed by his now unfamiliar name. The children, who crouched together frightened by the darkness, were as phantoms to her, like a dream about which she had just got into the stage of doubt. Till now it had been all real to her, as dreams appear at first. But now, she stood, closing the door in the stillness of the evening, which, still as it was, was full of curiosity and questioning and prying eyes, and asked herself if these little figures were real, or inventions of her fancy. Real children of her living brother—was it true, was it possible? They were awestricken by the gathering dusk, by the strange half-empty room, by the dim circle of the unknown which surrounded them on every side. The nurse had put herself upon a chair on the edge of the carpet, where she sat holding the little boy on her knee, while little Lilia, who had backed slowly towards this one familiar figure, stood leaning against her, clutching her also with one hand, though she concealed instinctively this sign of fear. The boy withdrew the wondering whiteness of his face from the nurse's shoulder now and then to give a frightened, fascinated look around, then buried it again in a dumb trance of dismay and terror, too frightened to cry. What was to be done with these frightened children and the strange woman to whom they clung? Mary could not keep them here to send them wild with alarm. They wanted soft beds, warm fires, cheerful lights, food and comfort,

and they had come to seek it in the only house in the world which was closed by a curse and a vow against them. Mary Musgrave was not the kind of woman who is easily frightened by vows or curses ; there was none of the romantic folly in her which would believe in the reality of an unjust or uncalled-for malediction. But she was persuaded of the reality of a thing which involved no supernatural mysteries, the obstinacy of her father's mind, and his determination to hold by the verdict he had given. Years move and change everything, even the hills and the seas—but not the narrow mind of an obstinate and selfish man. She did not call him by these names ; he was her father and she did not judge him ; but no more did she hope in him. And in this wonderful moment a whole circle of possibilities ran through her mind. She might take them to the village ; but there were other dangers there ; or to the Parsonage, but Mr. Pen was weak and poor Emily a gossip. Could she dare the danger that was nearest, and take them somehow upstairs out of the way, and conceal them there, defying her father ? In whatever way it was settled she would not desert them—but what was she to do ? Miss Brown coming upon her suddenly in the dusk frightened her almost as much as the children were frightened. The want of light and the strangeness of the crisis combined made every new figure like a ghost.

“ Yes, I sent for you. I am in—difficulty, Martha. These children have just come—the children of a friend——” Her first idea was to conceal the real state of the case even from her confidential and well-informed maid.

“ Dear me,” said Miss Brown, with seeming innocence. “ How strange ! to bring a little lady and gentleman without any warning. But I'll go and give orders, ma'am ; there are plenty of rooms vacant, there need not be any difficulty——”

Miss Musgrave caught her by the arm.

“ What I want for the moment is light, and some food *here*. Bring me the lamp I always use. No, not Eastwood ; never mind Eastwood. I want you to bring it, they will be less afraid in the light.”

“ There is a fire in the dining-room, ma'am, it is only a step,

and Eastwood is lighting the candles ; and there you can have what you like for them."

It was confidence Miss Brown wanted—nothing but confidence. With that she was ready to do anything ; without it she was Miss Musgrave's respectable maid, to whom all mysteries were more or less improper. She crossed her hands firmly and waited. The room was growing darker and darker every minute, and the foreign nurse began to lose patience. She called "Madame ! madame ! in a high voice ; then poured forth into a stream of words, so rapid and so loud as both mistress and maid thought they had never heard spoken before. Miss Musgrave was not a great linguist. She knew enough to be aware that it was Italian the woman was speaking, but that was all.

"I do not understand you," she said in distress, going up to the little group. But as she approached a sudden accession of terror, instantly suppressed on the part of the little girl but irrepressible by the younger boy, and which broke forth in a disjointed way, arrested her steps. Were they afraid of her, these children ? "Little Lilius," she said piteously, "be a brave child and stand by me. I cannot take you out of this cold room yet, but lights are coming and you will be taken care of. If I leave you alone for a little while will you promise me to be brave and not to be afraid ?"

There was a pause, broken only by little flutterings of that nervous exhaustion which made the children so accessible to fear. Then a small voice said, dauntless, yet with a falter—

"I will stay. I will not be afraid."

"Thank God," said Mary Musgrave, to herself. The child was already a help and assistance. "Martha," she said hastily, "tell no one ; they are—my brother's children—"

"Good Lord !" said Martha Brown, frightened out of her primness. "And it's dark, and there's two big boxes, and master don't know."

"That is the worst of all," said Miss Musgrave sadly. She had never spoken to any one of her father's inexorable verdict against John and all belonging to him. "The heir ! and I must not take him into the house of his fathers ! Take care of them, take care of them while I go—— And, Martha, say nothing—not a word."

“ Not if they were to cut me in pieces, ma'am ! ” said Miss Brown fervently. She was too old a servant to work in the dark ; but confidence restored all her faculties to her. It was not, however, in the nature of things that she should discharge her commission without a betrayal more or less of the emergency. “ I want some milk, please,” she said to the cook, “ for my lady.” It was only in moments of importance that she so spoke of her mistress. And the very sound of her step told a tale.

“ I told ye there was somethink oop,” said Tom Gardener, still lingering in the kitchen.

And to see how the house brightened up, and all the servants grew alert in the flutter of this novelty ! Nothing had happened at the castle for so long—they had a right to a sensation. Cook, who had been there for a long time, recounted her experience to her assistants in low tones of mystery.

“ Ah, if ye'd known the place when the gentlemen was at home,” said cook ; “ the things as happened in t'auld house—such goings on ! —coming in late and early—o'er the watter and o'er the land—and the strivings, that was enough to make a body flee out of their skin ! ” She ended with a regretful sigh for the old times. “ That was life, that was ! ” she said.

Meanwhile Mary Musgrave came in out of the dark hall into the lighted warmth of the dining-room, where the glass and the silver shone red in the firelight. How cosy and pleasant it was there ! how warm and cheerful ! Just the place to comfort the children and make them forget their miseries. The children ! How easily her mind had undertaken the charge of them—the fact of their existence ; already they had become the chief feature in her life. She paused to look at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, to smooth her hair, and put the ribbon straight at her neck. The Squire was “ very particular,” and yet she did not remember to have had this anxious desire to be pleasant to his eyes since that day when she had crept to him to implore a reversal of his sentence. She had obtained nothing from him then ; would she be more fortunate now ? The colour had gone out of her face, but her eyes were brighter and more resolute than usual. How her heart beat when Mr. Musgrave said, “ Come in,” calmly from the midst of his studies, as she knocked trembling at the library door !

PART II.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE SILENCE OF YEARS.

"COME in," said the Squire. He was sitting among his books, working with such a genuine sense of importance as was strange to see. Mary did not know that she thought anything in the world (except this present mission of hers) so important as he thought his search into the heraldic fortunes of the family. He was in full cry after a certain "augmentation" which had got into the Musgrave arms no one well knew how. It was only the Musgraves of Penninghame who bore this distinction, and how did they come by it? It appeared in the thirteenth century—in the age of the Crusades. Was it in recollection of some feat of a Crusader!—that was the question. He put down his pen and laid one open book upon another as she came in. He had no consciousness in his mind to make him critical or inquiring. He did not observe her paleness, nor the special glitter in her eyes. "I am busy," he said, "so you must be brief. I think I have got hold of that 'chief' at last. After years of search it is exciting to find the first trace of it; but perhaps it is best to wait till I have verified my guesses—they are still not much more than guesses. What a satisfaction it will be when all is clear!"

"I am glad you are to have this satisfaction, papa."

"Yes, I know you take little interest in it for itself. Ladies seldom do; though I can't tell why, for heraldry ought to be an interesting science to them and quite within their reach. Nothing has happened about the dinner, I hope? I notice that is your general subject when you come into my room so late. Law business in the morning, dinner in the evening—a very good distribution. But I want a good dinner to-night, my dear, to celebrate my success."

"It is not about dinner. Father, we have been living a very quiet life for many years."

“Thank Heaven !” said the old man. “Yes, a quiet life. A man of my age is entitled to it, Mary. I never shrank from exertion in my time, nor do I now, as this will testify.” He laid his hand with a genial complaisance upon the half-written paper that lay before him. Then he said with a smile, “But make haste, my dear. There is still an hour before dinner, and I am in the spirit of my work. We need not occupy our time, you and I, with general remarks.”

“I did not mean it for a general remark,” she said with a tremble in her voice. “It is that I have something important—very important to speak of, and I don’t know how to begin.”

“Important—very important !” he said, with the indulgence of jocular superiority for a child’s undue gravity. “I know what these important matters are. Some poaching rascal that you don’t know how to manage, or a quarrel in the village ? Bring them to me : but bring them to-morrow, Mary, when my mind is at rest—I cannot give my attention now.”

“It is neither poaching nor quarrelling,” she said. “I can manage the village. There are other things. Father, though we have been quiet for so many years, it is not because there has been nothing to think of—no seeds of trouble in the past—no anxieties——”

“I don’t know what you are thinking of,” he said, pettishly. “No anxieties ? A man has them as long as he is in the world. We are mortal. Seeds of trouble ? I have told you, Mary, that you may spare me general remarks.”

“Oh, nothing was further from my mind than general remarks,” she cried. “I don’t know how to speak. Father—look here—read it ; it will tell its own story best. This is what, after the silence of years, I have received to-day.”

“The silence of years !” said the Squire. He had to fumble for his spectacles, which he had taken off, though he carefully restrained himself from betraying any special interest. A red colour had mounted to his face. Perhaps his mind did not go so far as to divine what it was ; but still a sudden glimmering, like the tremble of pale light before the dawn, had come into his mind.

And this was the thunderbolt that suddenly fell upon him in his quietness after the silence of years :—

“**M**Y DEAR SISTER MARY,—This will be given to you by my little daughter Liliias. The sight of my handwriting and of the children will be enough to startle you, so that I need not try to soften the shock which you must have already received. I claim from my father shelter for my children. Their mother is dead ; so are the others of my family whose very names will never be known to my nearest relations. Never mind that now. I am a man both sick and sorry, worn by the world, lonely, and not much better than an adventurer. These children are the last of our race, and the boy, however reluctant you may be, is my father’s heir. I claim for them the shelter of the family roof. I have no home to give them, nor can I give them the care they require. Mary, you are a good woman : you are blameless one way or another. I charge you with my children. God do so to you and more also, according as you deal with them. Some time or other before I die I will drag myself home. That you may be sure of, unless God cuts short my life by the way, of which, if He will, I shall not complain.

“Your brother,

“JOHN MUSGRAVE.”

This was the letter which the Squire placed upon his mouldy books, over the statement he had been writing. He did not speak, but read it steadily to the end, betraying no emotion except by the glow of colour that rose over his weather-beaten face. Who that has sat by, anxious, watching the effect of such a letter, needs to be told with what intense observation Mary Musgrave noted every sign of the rigid control he kept upon himself—the tight clutch of one hand upon the table, the tremor of the other which held the letter ? But the Squire said nothing, not even when he had visibly come to the end. He held it before him still for some minutes ; then he began to fold it elaborately—but said nothing still. The shadow of his head with its falling locks of white hair shook a little upon the wall. There is a peculiar tremble which shows the very severity of restraint, and this was of that kind.

"Father! have you nothing to say?"

"I thought it was a subject put aside, not to be mentioned between us," he said. "I may be wrong—if I am wrong you can inform me; but I supposed this and all cognate subjects to be closed between us——"

"How can this be closed; I have ceased to importune you, but this is a new opening. And there is more than the letter—the children——"

"Ah!" He gave a slight cry. If he could it would have been an exclamation of scorn, but this was too much for him; the cry was sharp with impatient pain.

"I could not keep *them* a secret from you, father."

"I hate secrets," he said; "nevertheless there are few families in which they are not necessary. When he had said this he pushed the letter towards her, drew forward his heraldry books, and took his pen in his hand.

"Will you say nothing to me?" she cried. "Will you give me no answer? What am I to do?"

"Do! It seems to me quite an unnecessary question. It is a long time since I have given up exercising any control over you, Mary," he said.

"But, father, have a little pity. The house is not mine to do as I like with."

"That is unfortunate," he said with a cold precision which made it doubtful whether he spoke satirically or in earnest. "But it is not my fault. You cannot expect me to make place voluntarily for another; and even if I did, as you are a woman, it would be of very little use to you. You cannot be the heir——"

"And this boy is!" she said with a gesture of appeal.

Mr. Musgrave said nothing. He shook his head impatiently, pushed the letter to her with an energy that flung it into her lap, and resumed his writing. She stood by while he deliberately returned to his description of the "chief," turning up a page in his heraldry book, where all the uses and meanings of that "augmentation" were discussed. According to all appearance his mind took up this important question exactly where he had left it; and he resumed his writing steadily, betraying agitation

only by a larger, bolder, and firmer handwriting than usual. His daughter stood for a moment by his side, and watched him speechless—then went out of the room without another word. The Squire went on writing for a full minute more. The lines he wrote had not been so bold, so firm, so well-defined for years. Was it because he had to put forth the whole force that remained in him, soul and body, to get them upon the paper at all? When all sound of her departing steps had died out, he stopped suddenly, and, putting down his pen, let his head drop upon the open book and its figured page. An augmentation of honour! The days were over in which such gifts came from heralds and kings. And instead, here were struggles of a very different kind from those which won new blazons. But the most insensible, the most self-controlled of men, could not take such an interruption of his studies with absolute calm. He had never been in such desperate conflict with any man as with this son, and here his enemy, whom nature forbade to be his enemy, his antagonist, had come again after the silence of years and confronted him. To see such a one pass by could not but excite a certain emotion; but to meet him thus as it were face to face! The passion of parental love has been often portrayed. There is no passion more fervent, none perhaps even that can equal it; but there is another passion scarcely less intense—that which rises involuntarily in the bosom of a man between whom and his son there are no ties of mutual dependence, when the younger has become as the elder, knowing good and evil, and all the experiences of life; when there is no longer any question of authority and obedience, and natural affection yields to a strain of feeling which is too strong for it. Many long years had passed now since young Musgrave ceased to be his father's pride and boyish second in everything. He had grown a man, his equal, and had resisted and held his own in the conflict half a lifetime ago. All the embitterment which close relationship gives to a deadly quarrel had been between them, and though the father had so far got the better as to drive the rebel out of his sight, he had not crushed his will or removed him from his standing-ground. He was the victor, though the vanquished. His son had not yielded, nor would ever yield. When Mr. Musgrave raised his head his face was pale, and his head shook

with a nervous tremor; all the broken redness of his cheeks shone like pencilled lines through his pallor, increasing it. "This will never do," he said to himself, and rising, went to an old oak cupboard in the corner, and poured himself a small glass of the strongest of liqueurs. Not for all that remained of the Musgrave property would he have shown himself so broken, so overcome. This other man who was no younger, but only stronger than himself, was at the same time his successor, ready to push him out of his seat; waiting for a triumph that must come sooner or later. He had been able to forget all about him for years; to thrust out the thought of him when it recurred; but here the man stood once more confronting him. The Squire was wise in his way, and knew that there was nothing in the world so bad for the health, or so likely to give his antagonist an advantage, as the indulgence of emotion—therefore he crushed it "upon the threshold of the mind." He would not give him so much help towards the inevitable eventual triumph. He went back to his writing-table when he had fortified himself with that potent mouthful; but, knowing himself, tried his pen upon a stray bit of paper before he would resume his writing. What he wrote was in the quivering lines of old age. He tore it into pieces. No one should see such a sign of agitation in the manuscript which was to last longer than he. He took up the most learned of his books, and began to read with close attention. Here, at all events, the adversary should not get the better of him; or, at least, if thoughts did surge and rise, obliterating the old escutcheon altogether and the lion on its "chief," nobody should be the wiser.

Thus the old man sat, with a desperate courage worthy a better object, and mastered the furious excitement in his mind. But he was not thinking of the children as perhaps the reader of this story may suppose. He was not resisting the thrill of natural interest, the softening of heart which might have attended that sudden arrival. He did not even realize the existence of the children. His thoughts were of conflicts past, and of the opponent against whom he had striven so often: the opponent whom he could not altogether dismiss or get rid of, his rival, his heir, his successor, his son. There was nothing

he had wished as a father, as a Musgrave, as the head of a great county family, which this man had not done his best to undo : and as he had by ill-fortune thirty years the advantage of his father, there was no doubt that he would, some time or other, undo and destroy to an extent of which he was incapable now ; unless indeed he was prevented in the most disgraceful way, incapacitated by public conviction of crime—conviction, which was only too probable, which hung over his banished head and prevented his return home. What would there be but pain in the thought of such a son—an opponent if he were innocent, if he were guilty a disgrace to the family name ? The more completely the Squire could banish this thought from his mind, the happier he was ; and he had banished it with wonderful success for many years past. He had done all he could to evade the idea that he himself would one day be compelled to die. Many men do this who have no painful consciousness of the heir behind who is waiting to dispossess them ; and Mr. Musgrave had, to a great degree, attained tranquillity on this point. The habit of living seems to grow stronger with men as they draw near the end of their lives. It has lasted so long ; it has been so steady and uninterrupted, why should it ever cease ? But here was the death's-head rising at the feast ; the executioner giving note of his presence behind backs. John ! he had dismissed him from his mind. He had exercised even a kind of Christianity in forgetting him. But here he was again, incapable of being forgotten. What a tremor in his blood—what undue working of all that machinery of the heart which it was so essential to keep in calm good order had this interruption caused ! he who had no vital energy to spare ; who wanted it all for daily comfort and that continuance which with younger people is so lightly taken for granted. How much of that precious reserve had been consumed by this shock ! It had been done on purpose, perhaps, to try what the effect of such a shock upon his nerves and fibres would be.

Mr. Musgrave pushed back his chair again from the table, and gave all his faculties to the task of calming himself down. He would not allow himself to be overcome by John. But it took him a long time to accomplish this, to get his pulse back to its

usual rate of beating. When he relaxed for a moment in his watch over himself, old recollections would come back, scenes of the long warfare, words that were as swords and smote him over again with burning and stinging wounds. He had to calm it all down and still memory altogether if he would recover his ordinary composure. It wanted about an hour of dinner when he began this process. Up to that time it did not so much matter except for wearing him out and diminishing his strength. But it was his determination that no one should know or see this agitation which he had not been able to master. His daughter thought she had a harder task before her when she left him and hurried back to the ghostly half-lighted hall where she had left the children ; but what was her work, or the commotion of her thoughts, in comparison to that which raged within the bosom of the old man in his solitude, defying Heaven and nature, and all gentler influences—whose conflict was for himself only, as it was carried on unhelped and unthought of by himself alone ?

CHAPTER V.

WAKING UP.

MISS MUSGRAVE went back to her visitors with a heightened colour and assured step. Her alarm had departed along with her wistful and hopeful ignorance as to what her father might do. Now that she knew, her courage came back to her. When she opened the door which led out of the little passage into the hall, the scene before her was striking and strange enough to arrest her like a picture. The great ancient room, with its high raftered roof and wide space, lay in darkness—all but one bright spot in the midst where the lamp stood on the table. Miss Brown had hastily arranged a kind of homely meal, a basket of oatcakes, some white bread in a napkin, biscuits, home-made gingerbread, and a jug of fresh milk. The white and brown bread, the tall white jug, the cloth upon the tray, all helped to

increase the whiteness of that spot in the gloom. In the midst of this light sat the Italian nurse, dark and vigorous, with the silver pins in her black hair, and red ribbons at her breast. The pale little boy sat on her knee ; he had a little fair head like an angel in a picture, light curling hair, and a delicate complexion, white and red, which was fully relieved against that dark background. The child's alarm had given way a little, but still, in the intervals of his meal, he would pause, look round him into the gloom, and clutch with speechless fright at his attendant, who held him close and soothed him with all the soft words she could think of. Little Lilius stood by her on the further side, sufficiently recovered to eat a biscuit, but securing herself also, brave as she was, by a firm grasp of the nurse's arm to which she hung, tightly embracing it with her own. Miss Brown was flitting about this strange little group, talking continuously, though the only one among them who was disposed to talk could not understand her, and the children were too worn out to pay any attention to what she said.

There was a little start and thrill among the three who held so closely together when the lady returned. Little Lilius put down her biscuit. She became the head of the party as soon as Miss Musgrave came back—the plenipotentiary with whom to conduct all negotiations. Nello, on the other hand, buried his head in his nurse's shoulder. In the midst of all her agitation and confusion it troubled Miss Musgrave that the child should hide his face from her. The boy who was like herself and her family was the one to whom her interest turned most. Lilius bore another resemblance, which was no passport to Mary Musgrave's heart. Yet it was hard to resist the fascination of this child's sense and courage ; the boy, as yet, had shown himself capable of nothing but fear.

" Go, and have fires lighted at once in the two west rooms—make everything ready," Mary said, sending Miss Brown away peremptorily. It was not a worthy feeling perhaps, but it vexed her, agitated as she was, to see that her maid woke no alarm in the children, while she, their nearest relation, she who, if necessary, had made up her mind to sacrifice everything for them, was an object of fear. She thought even that the children

clung closer to their nurse and shrank more from herself when Martha was sent away. Miss Musgrave stood at the other side of the table and looked at them with many conflicting thoughts. It was altogether new to her, this strange mixture of ignorance and wonder, and almost awe, with which she felt herself contemplating these unknown little creatures, henceforward to be wholly dependent upon her. They were afraid of her, but she was scarcely less afraid of them, wondering with an ache in her heart whether she would be able to feel towards them as she ought, to bring her middle-aged thoughts into sympathy with theirs, to be soft and gentle with them as their helplessness demanded. Love does not always come with the first claim upon it; how was she to love them, little unknown beings whose very existence she had never heard of before? And Mary thought of herself with a certain pity in this strange moment, remembering almost with a sense of injury that the fountain of mother's love had never been awakened in her at all. Was it thus to be awakened? She was not an angelic woman, as poor Mr. Pen imagined her to be. She knew this well enough, though he did not know it. She had been young and full of herself when the family misfortunes happened, and since then what had there been in her life to warm or awaken the heart? Was she capable of loving? she asked herself; was there not a chill atmosphere about her which breathed cold upon the children and drove them away? This thought gave her a pang, as she stood and looked at the two helpless creatures before her, too frightened now to munch their biscuits, one gazing at her with big pathetic eyes, the other hiding his face. An ache of helplessness and pain not less great than theirs came into her mind. She was as helpless as they were, looking at them across the table, as if across a world of separation which she did not know how to bridge over, with not only them to vanquish, but herself. At last she put out her hands with the sense of weakness, such as perhaps she had never felt before. She had not been able, indeed, to influence her father, but she had not felt helpless before him; on the contrary, his hardness had stirred her to determination on her side, and a sense of power which quickened the flowing of her blood. But before these

children she felt helpless ; what was she to do with them, how bring herself into communication with them ? She put out her hands—hands strong to guard, but powerless she thought to attract. “Lilias, will you come to me ?” she said with a tremulous tone in her voice.

The weariness, the strangeness, the darkness had been almost too much for Lilias ; her mouthful of biscuit and draught of milk had been too quickly interrupted by the return of the strange, beautiful lady, with whom she alone, she was aware, could deal. And she could not respond to that appeal without quitting hold of Martuccia, who, though powerless to treat with the lady, was still a safeguard against the surrounding blackness, a something to cling to. But the child was brave as a hero, notwithstanding the nervous susceptibility of her nature. She disengaged her arm slowly from her one stay, keeping her eyes all the time fixed upon Miss Musgrave, half attracted by her, half to keep herself from seeing those dark corners in which mysterious dangers seemed to lurk ; and came forward, repressing the sob that rose in her throat, her little pale face growing crimson with the strain of resolution which this effort cost her. It was all Lilias could do to move round the table quietly, not to make a rush of fright and violent clutch at the hand held out to her—even though it was the hand of a stranger, from which in itself she shrank. Mary put her arm round the little trembling figure, and smoothing away the dark hair from her forehead, kissed the little girl with lips that trembled too. She would do her duty by her ; never would she forsake her brother’s child ; and with the warmth of this resolution tears of pity and tenderness came into her eyes. But when Lilias felt the protection of the warm soft arm about her, and the tenderness of the kiss, her little heart burst forth with a strength of impulse which put all laws at defiance. With a sobbing cry she threw herself upon her new protector, caught at her dress, clung to her waist, nestled her head into her bosom, with a close pressure which was half gratitude, half terror, half nervous excitement. Mary was taken by storm. She did not understand the change that came over her. A sudden warmth seemed to come into her veins, tingling to her very finger-points. She too, mature and self-restrained as she was, began to weep, a

sudden flood of tears rushing to her eyes against her will. "My child, my brave little girl!" she said almost unawares, recognising in her heart a soft surprise of feeling which was inexplicable; was this what nature did, sheer nature? she had never felt anything like it before. She held the child in her arms and cried over her, the tears falling over those dark curls which had nothing to do with the Musgraves, which even resembled another type with which the Musgraves would have nothing to do!

As she stood thus overcome by the double sensation of the child's nestling and clinging, and by the strange, sudden development of feeling in herself, Mary Musgrave felt two soft touches upon her hand which were notmistakable, and which made her start and flush, with the decorum of an Englishwoman surprised. It was Martuccia, who, moved like all her race by quick impulses of emotion, had risen hastily to her feet in sympathy, and had kissed the lady's hand, and put forward her little charge to perform the same act of homage. This roused Mary from her momentary breaking down. She took the little boy by the hand whom she found at her feet, not quite so frightened as at first, but still holding fast by the nurse's skirts, and led them both into the house. They were too much awed to make any noise, but went with her, keeping close to her, treading in her footsteps almost, closer and closer as they emerged into one unknown place after another. Wonder kept them still as she took them through the cheerful lighted dining-room, and up the stairs. Eastwood was busy about his table, putting it in that perfect order which it was his pride to keep up ("For who is more to me nor my family? what's company?" said Eastwood; "it's them as pays me as I'm bound to please"); but Eastwood was too good a servant to manifest any feeling. He had, of course, heard all about the arrival, not only from the gardener, but from every one in the kitchen; and he was aware, as nobody else was, that there had been a private interview between the father and daughter, to which she had gone with a pale face, and come back with nostrils expanded, and a glow of resolution upon her. Eastwood was not an old servant, but he had learned all that there was to learn about the family, and a little more. His

interest in the Musgraves was not so warm as that of cook for instance, who had been born in the place, and had known them from their cradles ; but he had the warm curiosity which is common to his kind. He gave a glance from beneath his eyebrows at the new-comers, wondering what was to become of them. Would they be received into the house for good ; and if so, would that have any effect upon himself, Eastwood ? would it, by and by, be an increase of trouble, a something additional to do ? He was no worse than his neighbours, and the thought was instinctive and natural, for no one likes to have additional labour. “ But he’s but a little chap ; it’ll be long enough before he wants valeting—if ever,” Mr. Eastwood said to himself. What would be wanted would be a nurse, not a valet ; and if that black-eyed foreigner didn’t stay, Eastwood knew a nice girl from the village whom the place would just suit. So he cast no unkindly eye upon the children as he went noiselessly about in his spotless coat, putting down his forks, which were quite as spotless. The sight of the table with its bouquet of autumn flowers excited Lilius. “ Who is going to dine there ? ” she said, with a pretty childish wile, drawing down Miss Musgrave towards her to whisper in her ear.

“ I am, Lilius.”

“ May we come too ? ” said the little girl. “ Nello is very good—he does not ask for anything ; we know how to behave.”

“ There will be some one else besides me,” said Mary, faltering slightly.

“ Then we do not want to come,” said Lilius with decision. “ We are not fond of strangers.”

“ I am a stranger, dear——”

“ Oh no, you are Mary ! ” said the child, embracing Miss Musgrave’s arm with her own two arms clasped round it, and raising her face with the confidence of perfect trust. These simple actions made Mary’s heart swell as it had not done for years—as indeed it had never done in her life. Other thrills there might have been in her day, but this fountain had never been opened before, and the new feeling was almost as strangely sweet to her as is the silent ecstasy in the bosom of the new mother, whose baby has just brought into the world such an

atmosphere of love. It was like some strange new stream poured into her heart, filling up all her veins.

The firelight had already begun to sparkle pleasantly in the bedrooms, and Mary found herself suddenly plunged into those pleasant cares of a mother which make time fly so swiftly. She had found so much to do for them, getting them to bed and making the weary little creatures comfortable, that the bell rang for dinner before she was aware. She left them hastily, and put herself into her evening gown with a speed which was anxiously seconded by Miss Brown, who for her part was just as eager to get back to the children as was her mistress. Miss Musgrave did not know what awaited her when she went down-stairs, or what battles she might have to fight. She had another duty now in the world beyond that claimed by her father. He had no such need of her as these children, who in all the wide world had no protector or succour but herself. Her heart beat a little louder and stronger than usual ; her bearing was more dignified. The indifference which had been in her life this morning had passed away. How strange it seemed now to think of that calm which nothing affected much, in which she had been comparatively happy, but which now appeared so mean and poverty-stricken. The easy quiet had gone out of her life ;—was it for ever ?—and instead there had come in a commotion of anxieties, hopes, and doubts and questions manifold ; but yet how miserable to her in comparison seemed now that long loveless tranquillity ! She was another woman, a living woman, she thought to herself, bearing the natural burden of care, a burden sweetened by a hundred budding tendernesses and consolations. It is well to have good health and enough to do ; these had been the bare elements of existence, out of which she had managed to form a cold version of living ; but how different was this vivid existence, new-born yet eternal, of love and care ! She was like one inspired. If she had been offered the alternative, as she almost expected, of leaving the house or giving up the children, with what pride would she have drawn her cloak round her and left her father's house ! This prospect seemed near enough and likely enough as she walked into the dining-room, with her head high, and a swell of conscious force in her

bosom. Whatever might be coming she was prepared for any blow.

Mr. Musgrave, too, was late. He who was the soul of punctuality did not enter the room for a minute or more after his daughter had hastened there, knowing herself late—but whereas she had hurried her toilet, his had never been more careful and precise. He took his seat with deliberate steadiness, and insisted upon carving the mutton and partridge which made their meal, though on ordinary occasions he left this office to Eastwood. It gratified him, however, to-day, to prove to himself and to her how capable he was and how steady were his nerves. And he talked while he did this with unusual energy, going over again all the history of the “chief.”

“I hope it will interest the general reader,” he said. “Not many family questions do, but this is really an elucidation of history. It throws light upon a great many things. You scorn heraldry, Mary, I am aware.”

“No, I do not think I scorn it.”

“Well, at all events you are little interested; the details are not of much importance, you think. In short, I suspect,” he added, with a little laugh, “that if the truth were told, you and a great many other ladies secretly look upon the science as one of those play-sciences that keep men from being troublesome. You don’t say so, but I believe you think we fuss and make work for ourselves in this way while you are carrying on the real work of the world.”

“I am not so self-important,” she said; but there was a great deal of truth in the suggestion if her mind had been free enough to think of it. What was it else but a play-science to keep country gentlemen too old for fox-hunting out of mischief? This is one of the private opinions of the gynæcæum applying to many grave pursuits, an opinion which circulates there in strictest privacy and is not spoken to the world. Mary would have smiled at the Squire’s discrimination had her mind been free. As it was, she could do nothing but wonder at his liveliness and composure, and say to herself that he must be waiting till Eastwood went away. This, no doubt, was why he talked so much, and was so genial. He did not wish to betray anything

to the man, and her heart began to beat once more with renewed force as the moment came for his withdrawal. No doubt the discussion she feared would come, and most likely come with double severity then. She had seen all this process gone through before.

But when Eastwood went away the Squire continued smiling and conversational. He told her of a poacher who had been brought to him, a bumpkin from a distant farm, to whom he meant to be merciful ; and of some land which was likely to be in the market, which would, if it could be got, restore an old corner of the estate and rectify the ancient boundary.

“I do not suppose there is any hope of such a thing,” he said, with a sigh. “And besides, what does it matter to me that I should care ? my time cannot be very long.”

“The time of the family may be long enough,” she said, with a throb of rising excitement, for surely now he would speak ; “one individual is not all.”

“That is a sound sentiment, though perhaps it may seem a little cold-hearted when the individual is your father, Mary.”

“I did not mean it to be cold-hearted ; you have always taught me to consider the race.”

“And so you ought,” he said, “though you don’t care so much for the blazon as I could wish. I should like to talk to Burn and to see what the lawyers would think of it. I confess I should like to be Lord of the Manor at Critchley again before I die.”

“And so you shall, father, so you shall ! ” she cried. “We could do it with an effort : if only you would—if only you could——”

He interrupted her hastily.

“When Burn comes to-morrow let me see him,” he said. “This is no question of what I could or would. If it can be done it ought to be done. That is all I have to say. Is it not time you were having tea ? ”

This was to send her away that he might have his evening nap after dinner. Mary rose at the well-known formula, but she came softly round to his end of the room to see that the fire was as he liked it, and lingered behind his chair, not knowing

whether to make another appeal to him. Her presence seemed to make him restless; perhaps he divined what was floating in her mind. He got up quickly before she had time to speak.

"On second thoughts," he said, "as I was disturbed before dinner, I had better resume my work at once. You can send me a cup of tea to the library. It is not often that one has such a satisfactory piece of work in hand; that charms away drowsiness. Be sure you send me a cup of tea."

"You will not—over-fatigue yourself, father?" said Mary, faltering. "I—hope you will not do too much."

This was not what she meant to say, but these were the only words that she could manage to form out of her lips.

"Oh, no; do not be uneasy. I shall not overwork myself," said the Squire once more, with a laugh.

And he went out of the room before her, erect and steady, looking younger and stronger in the force of that excitement which he was so careful to conceal. Mary did not know what to think. Was he postponing his sentence to make it more telling? or was he, happier thought, moved by the new event as she herself had been, warmed into forgiveness, into relenting, into the happiness of old age in children's children? Could this be so? She stood over the fire in her agitation holding her hands out to the ruddy blaze, though she was not cold. Her heart beat violently against her breast. How uneasy a thing this life was, how restless and full of change and commotion! Yet so much more, so much greater than the gentler stagnation which was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE VICARAGE.

THE vicarage was stilled in the quiet of the evening, the children in bed, the house at rest. It was not the beautiful and dignified old house which in England is the ideal dwelling of the gentleman parson, the ecclesiastical squire of the parish. And indeed Mr. was not of that order. Though there had been

many jokes when he first entered upon the cure as to the resemblance between his name and that of the parish, Pennithorne of Penninghame was a purely accidental coincidence. Mr. Musgrave was the patron, but the living was not wealthy enough or important enough to form that appropriate provision for a second son which, according to the curious subordination and adaptation of public wants to family interests, has become the rule in England, unique, as are so many others. Randolph Musgrave had his rectory in one of the midland counties, in the district which was influenced by his mother's family, where there was something more worth his acceptance ; and his old tutor had got the family living. Mr. Pennithorne was not a distinguished scholar with chances of preferment through his college, and it had been considered a great thing for him when, after dragging the young Musgraves through a certain proportion of schooling and colleging, he had subsided into this quiet provision for the rest of his life. He was a clergyman's son, with no prospects, and whatsoever glimmerings of young ambition there might have been in him, there was no coming down involved when he accepted the small rural vicarage where his heart was. We have already said that in his wildest hopes a vision of the possibility of bringing Mary Musgrave to the vicarage to share his humble circumstances with him had never entered into Mr. Pennithorne's mind ; but to be near her was something, and to be her trusted and confidential friend seemed the best that life could give him. Here he had remained ever since, being of some use to her, as he hoped, from time to time, and some comfort at least, if nothing more, in the convulsions of the family. During the first years of his incumbency, Mr. Pennithorne's own mind had been subject to many convulsions as one suitor after another came to the Castle ; but as they had all ridden away again with what grace they could after their rejection, comfort had come back. It was a curious passion, and one which we do not pretend to explain. After a while, impelled by friends, by convenience, and by the soft looks of Emily Coniston, the daughter of the clergyman in his native place, to which he had gone on a visit, he had himself found it possible to marry, without any failure of his allegiance to his visionary love ; but still to this day,

though he had been Emily's husband for ten years, it troubled the good vicar when any stranger came to the Castle whose society seemed specially pleasant to Miss Musgrave. He would hang about the place at such times like an alarmed hen when something threatens the brood, nor ceased to cluck and flutter his wings till the danger was over. Did he not wish her happiness? Ah, yes, and would, he thought, have given his life to procure it; but was it necessary that happiness should always be got in that one vulgar way? Marriage was well enough for the vulgar, but not for Mary. It would have been a descent from her maiden dignity, a lowering of her position. He was willing that everybody should love her and place her on a pedestal above all women; but it wounded his finest feelings to think that she too, in her turn, might love. There was no man good enough or great enough to be worthy of awakening such a sentiment in Mary Musgrave's breast.

As is not unusual in such cases, Mr. Pennithorne, the chief inspiration of whose life was a visionary passion of the most exalted and exalting kind for a woman, had married a woman for whom no one could entertain any very exalted or impassioned feelings. Perhaps the household drudge is a natural double or attendant of the goddess. They "got on" very well together, people said, and Mr. Pen put up with his wife's little foolishnesses and fretfulnesses, as perhaps a man could not have done whose heart was fortified by no ideal passion. Emily was a good housekeeper of the narrow sort, caring very little for comfort, and very proud of her economy; and she was a good mother of the troublesome kind, whose children are always in the foreground, always wanting something, always claiming her attention. Mr. Pen adored them, and yet he was glad when they were got to bed, when his wife could be spoken to without one child clinging to her skirts, or another breaking in upon everything with plaintive appeals to mamma. But he took it for granted that this was how it must be, and that a more lovely course of life was impracticable. One woman excepted, all women, he thought, were like this; it is thus that the dogmatisms of common opinion are formed and kept up; and what could be done but to shrug his shoulders at the inevitable, escaping from it into

his study, or with a sigh into that world of the ideal where imagination is never ruffled by the incidents of common life. The children were in bed on this October night, and everything was still. The vicarage was not a handsome house, nor was it old, but merely modern, badly built, and common-place, redeemed by nothing but its garden, which was large, and gave a pretty surrounding to the place in summer. But the night had become stormy, and the wind was raving in the trees, making their close neighbourhood anything but an advantage. Mrs. Pennithorne thought it extravagant to use two sitting-rooms, so the family ate and lived in the dining-room—a dark room papered and furnished as, in the days when Mr. Pen was married, it was thought right to decorate such places, with a red flock paper of a large pattern, which relieved the black horsehair of the furniture. The room was not very large. It had a black marble mantel-shelf, with a clock upon it, and some vases of Bohemian glass, and a red and blue table-cover upon the table, about which there lingered always a certain odour of food, especially in cold weather, when the windows were closed. Mrs. Pennithorne sat between the fire and the table. She had some dressmaking in hand, which made a litter about—dark winter stuff for little Mary's frock; and as she had no genius for this work, it was a lingering and confusing business with her, and made her less amiable than usual. The reason why her husband was there at all instead of being in his study was that the evening was cold; but it had not yet become, according to Mrs. Pen's code, time for fires. There was one in the dining-room, for she had not been well; but to light a second so early in October was against all her traditions, and Mr. Pen had been driven out of his study, where he had been sitting in his great-coat, and now stood with his back to the fire, warming himself, poor man, in preparation for another spell of work at his sermon. He was thin, and felt the cold. It was this, she had just been saying, that had brought him, and not any regard for her loneliness—which indeed was quite true.

“No, Emily,” he said, meekly, “for I have my work to do, you know; but while I am here, I hope you are not sorry to see me. The children were rather late to-night.”

"I am glad to keep them up a little for company," she said. "It is not so cheerful sitting here all alone, hearing the wind roaring in the trees; and my nerves are quite gone. I never used to fear anything when I was a young girl, but now I start at every sound. I don't mean to blame *you*—but it is lonely sitting by one's self after being one of a large family."

"No doubt—no doubt," he said, soothingly. "I suppose we gain something as years go on, but we do lose something. That must be taken for granted in life."

"I don't like your philosophy, Mr. Pennithorne," said Emily; "the way you have of always making out that things have to be! I don't see it, for my part. I think a married woman should have a great deal to cheer her up that a girl can't have——"

"My dear," he said, "perhaps I am not much—and you know the parish is my first duty; but have you not the children?—dear children they are. I do not think there can be any greater pleasure than one's children——"

"You have nothing to do but enjoy them," said Mrs Pennithorne, slightly softened; "but if you had to work and slave like me! There is never a day that I have not something to do for them; mending, or making, or darning, or something. Fathers have an easy time of it; they play with the baby now and then, take out the elder ones for a walk, and that is all. That is nothing but pleasure; but to sit for days and work one's fingers to the bone——"

"I wish you would not, Emily. I have heard you say that Miss Price in the village was a very good dressmaker——"

"For those who can afford her," said Mrs. Pennithorne. "But," she added, with a better inspiration, "you make me look as if I were complaining, and I don't want to complain. Though it is dull, William, you must allow, sitting all the evening by one's self——"

"But I have to do the same," he said, with gentle hypocrisy. "You know, Emily, if I wrote my sermon here, we should fall to talking, which no doubt is far pleasanter—but it is not duty, and duty must come before all——"

"There is more than one kind of duty," said Mrs. Pennithorne, who was tearing her fingers with pins putting together two sides

of Mary's frock. While she was bending over this, the maid came into the room with a note. There was something in the "Ah!" with which he took it which made his wife raise her head. She was not jealous of Miss Musgrave, who was nearly ten years older than herself, an old maid, and beneath consideration; but she did think that William thought a great deal too much of the Castle. "What is it now?" she said pettishly. Perhaps once more—they had done it several times already—it was an invitation to dinner for Mr. Pennithorne alone. But he was so much interested in what he was reading that he did not even hear her. She sat with her scissors in her hand, and looked at him while he read the note, his face changing, his whole mind absorbed. He did not look like that when their common affairs were discussed, or the education of his children, which ought to be more interesting to him than anything else. This was other people's business—and how it took him up! Mrs. Pennithorne was a good woman, and did her duty to her neighbours when it was very clearly indicated; but still, of course, nothing could be of such consequence as your own family, and your duty to them. And to see how he was taken up, smiling, looking as if he might be going to cry! Nothing about Johnny or Mary ever excited him so. Mrs. Pennithorne was not only vexed on her own account, but felt it to be wrong.

"Well, life is a wonderful thing," he said suddenly. "I went to the Castle this afternoon——"

"You are always going to the Castle," she said, in a fretful voice.

"—Expressly to tell Miss Musgrave how much my mind had been occupied about her brother John. You never knew him, Emily; but he was my pupil, and I was very fond of him——"

"You are very fond of all the family, I think," she said, half-interested, half-aggrieved.

"Perhaps I was," he said, with a little sigh, which, however, she did not notice; "but John particularly. He was a fine fellow, though he was so hot-headed. The other night I kept dreaming of him, all night long—over and over again."

"That was what made you so 'restless, I suppose,'" Mrs. Pennithorne put in, in a parenthesis. "I am sure you have plenty belonging to yourself to dream of, if you want to dream."

"—And I went to ask if they had heard anything, smiling at myself—as she did, for being superstitious. But here is the wonderful thing: I had scarcely left, when the thing I had foreseen arrived. A carriage drew up containing John Musgrave's children——"

"Did you know John Musgrave's children? I never knew he had any children——"

"Nor did I, or any one!—that is the wonder of it. I felt sure something was happening to him or about him—and lo! the children arrived. It was no cleverness of mine," said Mr. Pennithorne with gentle complacency, "but still I must say it was a wonderful coincidence. The very day!"

Mrs. Pennithorne did not make any reply. She was not interested in a coincidence which had nothing to do with her own family. If Mr. Pen had divined when Johnny was to break his arm, so that they might have been prepared for that accident! but the Musgraves had plenty of people to take care of them, and there seemed no need for a new providential agency to give them warning of unsuspected arrivals. She put some more pins into little Mary's frock—the two sides of the little bodice never would come the same. She pulled at them, measured them, repinned them, but could not get them right.

"I have heard a great deal about John Musgrave," she said with a pin in her mouth. "What was it he did that he had to run away?"

"My dear Emily! don't do that, for heaven's sake—you frighten me; and besides, it is not—pretty—it is not becoming——"

"I think I am old enough by this time to know what is becoming," said Mrs. Pennithorne with some wrath, yet growing red as she took out the pins. She was conscious that it was not ladylike, and felt that this was the word her husband meant to use. "If you knew the trouble it is to get both sides the same!" she added, forgetting her resentment in vexation.

It was a troublesome job. There are some people in whose hands everything goes wrong. Mrs. Pen shed a tear or two over the refractory frock.

"My dear! I hope it is not my innocent remark——"

"Oh no, it is not any innocent remark. It is so troublesome. Just when I thought I had got it quite straight! But what do you know about such things? You have nothing to say to Mary's frock. You never would notice, I believe, if she had not one to her back, or wore the same old rag year after year——"

"Yes, Emily, I should notice," said Mr. Pen with some compunction; "and I am very sorry that you should have so much trouble. Send for Miss Price to-morrow, and I will pay her out of my own money. You must not take it off the house."

"Oh, William! William!" said his wife, "who is it that will suffer if your own money, as you call it, runs out? Do you think I am so inconsiderate as only to think of what I have for the house! Isn't it all one purse, and will it not be the children that will suffer eventually whoever pays? No, your money shall not be spent to save me trouble. What is the good of us but to take trouble?" said Mrs. Pen with heroic fortitude.

Mr. Pen sighed. Perhaps he was more conscious of the litter of dressmaking than of this fine sentiment. But anyhow he did not give any applause to the heroine. He left indeed this family subject altogether, and after a momentary pause, said, half to himself, "John Musgrave's children! Who could have thought it! And how strange it all is——"

"Really, Mr. Pennithorne," said his wife, offended, "this is too much. I don't believe you think one half so much of your own children as of those Musgraves. What did they ever do for us?"

"They did this for us, my dear, that but for them I should not have had a home to offer you—nor a family at all," said the vicar with a little warmth. "I might have been still travelling with boys about the world——"

"Oh, William, not with your talents," said his wife, looking at him with admiration. With all her fretfulness and insensibility to those fine points of internal arrangement for which he had a half-developed, half-subdued taste, Emily had still a great admiration for her husband. Now Mary Musgrave, who was, unknown to either, her spiritual rival, had no admiration for good Mr. Pen at all. This gave the partner of his life an infinite advantage. His voice softened as he replied, shaking his head:

"Unfortunately, my love, other people do not appreciate my talents as you do."

"That is because they don't know you so well," she said with flattering promptitude. Mr. Pennithorne drew a chair to the fire and sat down. It was but rarely that he received this domestic adulation ; but it warmed him, and did him good.

"Ah, my dear, I fear I must not lay that flattering unction to my soul," he said.

" You are too modest, William ; I have always said you were too modest," said Mrs. Pennithorne, returning good for evil. How little notice he had taken of her fine heroic feeling and self-abnegation ! Women are more generous ; she behaved very differently to him. And the fact was, he very soon began to think that old Mr. Musgrave had made use of him, and given him a very poor return. The vicarage was not much—and the Squire had never attempted to do anything more. It is sweet to be told that you are above your fate—that Providence owes you something better. He roused himself up, however, after a time out of that unwholesome state of self-complacency. "What a strange state of affairs it is, Emily," he said. He was not in the habit of making his wife his confidant on matters that concerned the Musgraves, but in a moment of weakness his resolution was overcome. "What a painful state of affairs ! Mr. Musgrave knows of the coming of these children, but he takes no notice, and whether she is to be allowed to keep them or not——"

" Dear me, think of having to get permission from your father at her time of life," said Mrs. Pennithorne, with a naïve pity. "And whom did he marry, William, and what sort of person was their mother ? I don't think you ever told me that."

" Their mother was—John's wife ; I must have told you of her. She was not the person his family wished. But that often happens, my dear. It is no sign that a man is a bad man because he may make what you may call a mistaken choice."

" My dear William," said Mrs. Pen, with authority, " there is nothing that shows a man's character so much as the wife he chooses ; my mother always said so. It is the best test if he is a nice feeling man or not," the vicar's wife said blandly, with a little conscious smile upon her face.

Mr. Pennithorne made no reply. There was something humorous in this innocent little speech, considering who the speaker was, to any one who knew. But then nobody knew; scarcely even Mr. Pennithorne himself, who at this moment was so soothed by his wife's "appreciation," that he felt himself the most devoted of husbands. He shook his head a little, deprecating the implied condemnation of his old pupil; for the moment he did not think of himself.

"Now that we are sitting together, and really comfortable for once in a way," said Mrs. Pennithorne, dropping Mary's bodice with all the pins, and drawing her chair a little nearer to the fire—"it does not happen very often—tell me, William, what it is all about, and what John Musgrave has done."

Again the vicar shook his head. "It's a long story," he said, reluctantly.

"You tell things so nicely, William, I sha'n't think it long; and think how strange it is, knowing so much about people, and yet not knowing anything. And of course I shall have to see the children. Poor little things, not to be sure of shelter in their grandfather's house! but they will always have a friend in you."

"They will have Mary; what can they want more if they have *her*?" he said suddenly, with a fervour which surprised his wife; then blushed and faltered as he caught her eye. What right had he to speak of Miss Musgrave so? Mrs. Pennithorne stared a little, but the slip did not otherwise trouble her, for she saw no reason for the exaggerated respect with which the Squire's daughter was treated. Why should not she be called Mary—was it not her name?

"Mary, indeed! what does she know about children? But, William, I am waiting, and this is the question—What did John Musgrave do?"

PART III.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHILDREN AT THE CASTLE.

THE arrival of the children was an era at Penninghame from which afterwards everything dated ; but the immediate result was a very curious and not very comfortable one. As they had been introduced into the house, so they lived in it. Mr. Musgrave never mentioned them, never saw them or appeared to see them, ignored their existence, in short, as completely as if his faculties had been deadened in respect to them. His life was in no way changed indeed ; the extraordinary revolution which had been made to every one else in the house by this change showed all the more strongly from the absence of all effect upon him. He read, he wrote, he studied, he took his usual quiet exercise exactly as he did before, and never owned by a word or look that he was conscious of any alteration in the household. For a little while the children were hushed not to make a noise, and huddled away into corners to keep them out of sight and hearing ; but that arrangement was too unnatural to continue, and it very soon happened that their presence was forced upon him by unmistakable signs, by both sight and hearing. But the Squire took not the slightest notice. He looked over their heads and never saw them. His ear was engaged with other sounds and he did not hear them. By this system of unconsciousness he deprived himself indeed of some evident advantages ; for how can you interfere with the proceedings of those whose very existence you ignore ? He could not give orders that the children should make less noise, because he professed not to be aware of their presence ; nor send them out of his sight, when he was supposed not to see them ; and in consequence this blindness and deafness on his part was perhaps a greater gain to them than to himself. The mental commotion into which he had been thrown by their arrival had never been known to any one but himself. He had a slight illness a few

days after—his liver out of order, the doctor said; and so worked off his excitement without disclosing it to any one. After this he resumed his serenity, and completed his heraldic study. The history of the augmentation granted to the Musgraves in the year 1393 in remembrance of the valour of Sir Egidio, or Giles, Musgrave in the Holy Land made rather a sensation among students in that kind. It was a very interesting monograph. Besides being a singularly striking chapter of family history, it was, everybody said, a most interesting contribution to the study of heraldic honours—how and why they were bestowed; especially as concerning “augmentations” bestowed on the field for acts of valour—a rare and exceptional distinction. The Squire made a little collection of the notices that appeared in the newspapers of his “Monograph,” pasting them into a pretty little book, as is not unusual with amateur authors. He enjoyed them a great deal more than if he had been the author of a great history, and resented criticism with corresponding bitterness. He was very proud of Egidio, or Giles, who died in the fifteenth century; and it did not occur to him that there was any incongruity between this devotion to his ancestors and the fact that he persisted in ignoring the little boy upstairs.

And yet day by day it grew more hard to ignore him. Mr. Musgrave in his study, after the enthusiasm of his monograph was over, could not help hearing voices which it was difficult to take no notice of. The enthusiasm of composition did a great deal for him: it carried him out of the present; it filled him with a delightful fervour and thrill of intellectual excitement. People who are always writing get used to it, and lose this sense of something fine and great which is the inheritance of the amateur. Even after the shock of renewed intercourse with the son, who had brought shame upon his name, and whom he had cast off, Mr. Musgrave, so long as his work lasted, found himself able to forget everything in the happiness it gave. When he woke in the morning his first thought was of this important occupation which awaited him, and he went to bed with the fumes of his own paragraphs in his head; he was carried away by it. But when all this intellectual commotion was over, and when the *ennui* of having nothing further to do had swallowed

up the satisfaction of having finished a great piece of work, as it so soon does, then there came a very difficult interval for the Squire. He had no longer anything to absorb him and keep him comfortably above the circumstances of ordinary life ; and as he sat in his library, only reading, only writing a letter, no longer absorbed by any special study, or by the pride and delight of recording in fine language the results of that study, ordinary life stole back, as it has a way of doing. He began to hear the knocks at the door, the ringing of bells, and to wonder what they meant ; to hear steps going up and down the stairs, to be aware of Eastwood in the dining-room, and the rustle of Mary's dress as she went about the house in the morning, and in the afternoon passed with a soft boom of the swinging door into her favourite hall. The routine of the house came back to the old man. He heard the servants in the kitchen, the ticking of that measured, leisurely old clock in the hall which took about five minutes to spell out the hour. He was not consciously paying any attention to these things. On the contrary, he was secluded from them, rapt in his books, knowing nothing of what was going on ; yet he heard them all ; and as he sat there through the long winter days and the still longer winter evenings, when there was rain or storm out of doors, and nothing to break the long, still blank of hours within, a sound would come to him now and then, even before the care of the household relaxed—the cry of a little voice, a running and patterning of small feet, sometimes an outburst of laughter, a small voice of weeping, which stirred strangely in the air about him and vaguely called forth old half-extinct sensations, as one might run over the jarred and half-silent keys of an old piano in the dark. This surprised him at first in his loneliness—then, when he had realized what it was, hurt him a little, rousing old wrath and bitterness, so that he would sometimes lay down his pen or close his book and all the past would come before him—the past, in which John his son had disappointed, mocked, insulted, and baffled his father. He would not allow himself to realize the presence of these children in the house, but he could not avoid thinking of the individual who stood between him and them, who was so real while they were so visionary.

Always John ! He had tried to live for years without thought of him and had been tranquil ; it was grievous to be compelled thus to think of him again. This all happened, however, in the seclusion of his own mind, in the quiet of his library, and no one knew anything of it ; not his daughter, who thought she knew his looks by heart ; nor his servant, who had spelled him out by many guesses in the dark—as servants generally do—and imagined that he had his master at his fingers' ends. But during all this time while these touches were playing upon him, bringing out ghosts of old sensations, muffled sounds and tones forgotten, Mr. Musgrave publicly ignored the fact that there were any children in the house, and contrived not to see them, nor to hear them, with a force of self-government and resolution which, in a nobler cause, would have been beyond all praise.

The effect of the change upon Miss Musgrave was scarcely less remarkable though very different. Her mental and moral education had been of a very peculiar kind. The tragedy which swallowed up her brother had interrupted the soft flowing current of her young life. All had gone smoothly before in the natural brightness of the beginning. And Mary, who had little passion in her temperament, who was more thoughtful than intense, and whose heart had never been awakened by any strong attachment beyond the ties of nature, had borne the interruption better than most people would have borne it, and had done her duty between her offending brother and her enraged father with less strain and violence of suffering than might have been imagined. And she had got through the more quiet years since without bitterness, with a self-adaptation to the primitive monotony of existence which was much helped, as most such virtues are, by temperament. She had formed her own theory of life, as most people do by the time they reach even the earliest stages of middle age ; and this theory was the philosophical one that happiness, or the calm which does duty for happiness in most mature lives, was in reality very independent of events ; that it came from within, not from without ; and that life was wonderfully equal, neither bringing so much good, nor so much evil, as people of lively imaginations gave it credit for doing. Thus she had herself lived, not unhappy, except at the very crisis of the family life.

She had suffered then. Who could hope (she said to herself) to do other than suffer one time or another in their life? But since then the calm and regularity of existence had come back, the routine which charms time away and brings content. There had no doubt been expectations in her mind which had come to nothing—expectations of more active joy, more actual well-being, than had ever fallen to her lot; but these expectations had gradually glided away, and no harm had been done. If she had no intensity of enjoyment, neither had she any wretchedness. She had enough to do; her life was full, and she was fairly happy. So she said to herself; so she had said many a day to Mr. Pen, who shook his mildly melancholy head and dissented—as far as he ever dissented from anything said by Miss Mary. Her brother was lost—away—wandering in the darkness of the great world as in a desert. But if he had been near at hand, absorbed in his married life, his wife, who was not of her species, and his unknown children, would not he have been just as much lost to Mary? So she persuaded herself at least; and so lived tranquilly, happy enough—certainly not unhappy;—and why should an ordinary mortal, youth being over, wish for more?

Now, however, all at once, so great a change had happened to her, that Mary could no longer understand, or even believe in, this state of mind which had been hers for so many years. Perfectly still, tranquil, fearing nothing—when her own flesh and blood were in such warfare in the world! How was it possible? Wondering pangs of self-reproach seized her; mysteries of death and of birth, such as had never touched her maidenly quiet, seemed to surround her, and mock at her former ease. All this time the gates of heaven had been opening and shutting to John. Hope sometimes, sometimes despair, love, anguish, want, pain, had struggled for him, while she had sat and looked on so calmly, and reasoned so placidly about the general equality of life. How could she have done it? The revelation was as painful as it was overwhelming. Nature seized upon her with a grip of iron, and avenged upon her in a moment all the indifferences of her previous life. The appeal of these frightened children, the solemn charge laid upon her by her brother, awoke her with a start and shiver. How had she dared to sit and look through

calm windows, or on the threshold by her tranquil door, upon the struggles, pangs, and labours of the other human creatures about her? Was it excuse enough that she was neither wife nor mother? had she therefore nothing to do in guarding, and continuing, and handing down the nobler successions of life? Mary was startled altogether out of the state of mind habitual to her. Instead of remaining the calm lady of the manor, the female Squire, the lawgiver of the village which she had hitherto been—a little above the problems that were brought to her, a little wanting in consideration of motives and meaning, perhaps now and then too decided in her judgment, seeing the distinction between right and wrong too clearly, and entertaining a supreme, though gentle contempt for the trimmings and compromises, as well as for the fusses and agitations of the ordinary world—she felt herself to have plunged all at once into the midst of those agitations at a single step. She became anxious, timorous, yet rash, faltering even in opinion, hesitating, vacillating—she who had been so decide and so calm. Her feelings were all intensified, the cords of her nature tightened, as it were, vibrating to the lightest touch. And at the same time, which was strange enough, while thus the little circle, in which she stood, became full of such intense, unthought-of interest, the world widened around her as it had never widened before ; into darknesses and silences indeed—but still with an extended horizon which expanded her heart. John was there in the wide unknown, which stretched round this one warm, lighted spot, wandering she knew not where, a solitary man. She had never realized him so before ; and not only John, but thousands like him, strangers, wanderers, strugglers with fate. This sudden breath of novelty, of enlightenment, expanded her heart like a sob. Her composure, her satisfaction, her tranquillity fled from her ; but how much greater, more real and true, more penetrating and actual, became her existence and the world ! And all this was produced, not by any great mental enlightenment, any sudden development of character, but by the simple fact—that two small helpless creatures had been put into her hands and made absolutely dependent upon her. This was all ; but the whole world could not have been more to Mary. It changed her in every way. She who

had been so rooted in her place, so absorbed in her occupations, would have relinquished all, had it been necessary, and gone out solitary into the world for the children. Could there be any office so important, any trust so precious? This, which sounded like the vulgarest commonplace, and at the same time most fictitious high-flown sentiment, on the lips of Mrs. Pennithorne, became all at once, in a moment, the leading principle of Miss Musgrave's life.

But she had to undergo various petty inconveniences from the curiosity of her neighbours, and their anxiety to advise her as to what she should do in the "trying circumstances." What could she know about children? Mrs. Pen, for one, thought it very important to give Miss Musgrave the benefit of her advice. She made a solemn visit to inspect them, and tell her what she ought to do. The little boy, she felt sure, was delicate, and would require a great deal of care; but the thing that troubled Mrs. Pennithorne the most was that Miss Musgrave could not be persuaded to put on mourning for her brother's wife. Notwithstanding that it was, as Mary pleaded, five years since she died, the vicar's wife thought that crape would be a proof that all "misunderstandings" were over, and would show a Christian feeling. And when she could not make this apparent to the person principally concerned, she did all she could to impress it upon her husband, whom she implored to "speak to"—both father and daughter—on the subject. Most people would have been all the more particular to put on crape, and to wear it deep, because there had been "misunderstandings." "Misunderstandings!" cried Mr. Pen. It was not, however, he who spoke to Miss Musgrave, but she who spoke to him on this important subject; and what she said somewhat bewildered the vicar, who could not fathom her mind in this respect.

"Emily thinks we should put on mourning," she said. "And, do you know, I really believe that is the reason that poor John is so much more in my thoughts?"

"What—the mourning?" the vicar asked faltering.

"*Her* death. Hitherto the idea of one has been mingled with that of the other. Now he is just John; everything else has melted away; there is nothing but himself to think of. He has

never been only John before. Do you know what I mean, Mr. Pen?"

The vicar shook his head. He wondered if this could be a touch of feminine jealousy, knowing that even Mary was not perfect; and this gave him a momentary pang.

"I don't suppose that I should feel so;—I was very fond of John—but I, of course, could not be jealous—I mean of his love for one unworthy——"

"How do you know even that she was unworthy? It is not that, Mr. Pen. But she was nothing to us, and confused him in our minds. Now he is himself—and where is he?" said Miss Musgrave, with tears in her eyes.

"In God's hands—in God's hands, Miss Mary! and God bless him wherever he is—and I humbly beg your pardon," cried Mr. Pen, with an excess of compunction which she scarcely understood. His feelings were almost too warm Mary thought.

And as the news got spread through those invisible channels which convey reports all over a country, many were the visitors that came to the Castle to see what the story meant, though they did not announce this as the object of their visit. Among these visitors the most important was Lady Stanton, who had been Mary's rival in beauty when the days were. They had not been rivals indeed to their own consciousness, but warm friends, in their youth and day of triumph; but events had separated the two girls, and the two women rarely met, and had outgrown all acquaintance; for Lady Stanton had been involved, almost more immediately than Mary Musgrave, in the tragedy which had so changed life at Penninghame, and this had changed their relations like everything else. This lady arrived one day to the great surprise of everybody, and came in with timid eagerness and haste, growing red and growing pale as she held out her hands to her old friend.

"We never quarrelled," she said; "why should we never see each other? Is there any reason?"

"No reason," said Miss Musgrave, making room upon the sofa beside her. But such an unexpected appeal agitated her, and for the moment she could not satisfy herself as to the object of

the visit. Lady Stanton, however, was of a very simple mind, and could not conceal what that object was.

"Oh, Mary," she said, the tears coming into her eyes, "I heard that John's children had come home. Is it true? You know I always took an interest——" And here she stopped, making a gulp of some emotion which, to a superficial spectator, might have seemed out of place in Sir Henry Stanton's wife. She had grown stout, but that does not blunt the feelings. "I should like to see them," she said, with an appeal in her eyes which few people could withstand. And Mary was touched too, partly by this sudden renewal of an old love, partly by the thought of all that had happened since she last sat by her old companion's side, who was a Mary too.

"I cannot bring them here," she said, "but I will take you to the hall to see them. My father likes them to be kept—in their own part of the house."

"Oh, I hope he is kind to them!" said Lady Stanton, clasping her white dimpled hands. "Are they like your family? I hope they are like the Musgraves. But likenesses are so strange—mine are not like me," said the old beauty, plaintively. Perhaps the trouble in her face was less on account of her own private trials in this respect than out of alarm lest John Musgrave's children should bear the likeness of another face of which she could not think with kindness. There was so little disguise in her mind, that this sentiment also found its way into words. "Oh Mary," she cried, "you and I were once the two beauties, and everybody was at our feet; but that common girl was more thought of than either you or me."

"Hush!" said Mary Musgrave, putting up her hand; "she is dead."

"Is she dead?" Lady Stanton was struck with a momentary horror; for it was a contemporary of whom they were speaking, and she could not but be conscious of a little shiver in her own well-developed person, to think of the other who was clay. "That is why they have come home?" she said, half under her breath.

"Yes; and because he cannot carry them about with him wherever he goes."

" You have heard from him, Mary ? I hope he is doing well. I hope he is not—very—heart-broken. If you are writing you might say I inquired. He might like to know that he was remembered ; and you know I always took—an interest——"

" I know you always had the kindest heart."

" I always took an interest, notwithstanding everything ; and—will he come home ? Now surely he might come home. It is so long ago ; and surely now no one would interfere."

" I cannot say anything about that, for I don't know," said Miss Musgrave ; " he does not say. Will you come and see the children, Lady Stanton ? "

" Oh, Mary, what have I done that you should call me Lady Stanton ? I have never wished to stand aloof. It has not been my doing. Do you remember what friends we were ? and I couldn't call you Miss Musgrave if I tried. When I heard of the children I thought this was an opening," said Lady Stanton, faltering a little. She told her little fib, which was an innocent one ; but she was true at bottom and told it ill ; and what difference did it make whether she sought the children for Mary's sake, or Mary for the children's ? Miss Musgrave accepted her proffered embrace with kindness, yet with a smile. She was touched by the emotion of her old friend, and by the remnants of that " interest " which had survived fifteen years of married life, and much increase of substance. Perhaps a harsher judge might have thought the emotion slightly improper. But poor John had got but hard measure in the world ; and a little compensating faithfulness was a salve to his sister's feelings. She led her visitor downstairs and through the narrow passage, in all her wealth of silk and amplitude of shadow. Mary herself was still as slim as when they had skimmed about these passages together ; and she was Mary still ; for once in a way she felt herself not without some advantage over Sir Henry's wife.

Nello was standing full in the light when the ladies went into the hall, and he it was who came forward to be caressed by the pretty lady, who took to him all the more warmly that she had no boys of her own. Lady Stanton fairly cried over his fair head, with its soft curls. " What a little Musgrave he is !" she cried ; " how like his father ! I cannot help being glad he is

like his father." But when this vision of splendour and beauty, which Liliás came forward to admire, saw the little girl, she turned from her with a slight shiver. "Ah!" she cried, retreating, "is that—the little girl?" And the sight silenced her, and drove her away.

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY STANTON.

LADY STANTON drove home from that visit with her heart and her eyes full. She was not intellectual, nor even clever, but a soft creature, made up of feelings easily touched, not perhaps very profound, nor likely to obscure to her the necessary course of daily living, but still true enough and faithful in their way. She might have been able to make sacrifices had she come in the way of them or found them necessary, but no such chance of moral devotion had come to her; nor had any teachings of experience or philosophy of middle age, such as works upon the majority of us, hardened her soft heart, or swept away the little romantic impulses, the quick sensibilities of youth. A nature so fresh indeed was scarcely compatible with much exercise of the intellectual faculties at all. Lady Stanton rarely read, and never under any circumstances read anything (of her own will and impulse) which rose above the most primitive and familiar elements; but on the other hand, the gentle sentimentalities which she did read went straight to her heart. She thought Mrs. Hemans the first of poets, and cried her eyes out over Mr. Dickens's "Little Nell." Anything about an unhappy love, or about a dead child, would move her more than Shakespeare; and she shed tears as ready as the morning dew. Practically, it is true, she had gone through a certain amount of experience like other people, and her everyday life was more or less affected by it; but in her heart Lady Stanton was still the same Mary Ridley whose gentle being had been involved in the wildest of tragic

stories, even though she had come down to so commonplace a daily routine now. That story, so long past, took the place in her being of all the poetry and romance which the most of us get glorified from the hands of genius ; and all her associations were attached to that one personal episode, which was unparalleled in life as she knew life. When she read one of the novels which pleased her, she would compare the situations in it with this ; when she lingered over the vague melodious verses which represented poetry to her, there was always a little appropriation in her heart of their soft measures to the dim long past emergency. And now, here it was brought back upon her by every circumstance that could bring the past near. Her love —was it her love that was recalled to her ? But then there was no love in it properly so called. She had taken an interest in John Musgrave, her friend's brother—always had taken an interest in him ; but she had no right to do so at any time, being betrothed to young Lord Stanton, who, for his part, had forgotten her for the sake of that dressmaker's girl at Penninghame, to whom John Musgrave too had given his heart. What a complication it was ! Mary Ridley, who had a pretty property close to his, had been destined for Lord Stanton from the beginning of time, and the boy and girl had lightly acquiesced, and had been happy enough in the parental arrangement. They had liked each other—well enough ; they had been as gay as possible in the lightheartedness of their youth, and had taken this for happiness. Why should not they be happy ? they were exactly suited to each other. She was the prettiest girl in the county (except the other Mary), and he was proud of her sweet looks, and fond of her, certainly fond of her ; whereas she, unawakened, undisturbed, notwithstanding the interest she had always taken in John Musgrave, would have made him the most affectionate and charming wife in the world. Thus the early story had flowed on all smoothness and sunshine, the flowers blooming, the sun shining ; until, one fatal day, young Lord Stanton, riding through Penninghame village on his way to the old Castle, had seen Lily, Miss Price's assistant, at the window of the dressmaker's parlour. Fatal day ! full of all the issues of death.

It is needless to inquire what manner of woman this Lily was, for whom these two men lost themselves and their existence. She did not know of any tragedy likely to be involved, but brushed about in her homely village way through these webs of fate, twisting the threads innocently enough, and throwing the weaving into endless confusion. Whether Lord Stanton was murdered by John Musgrave, as many people thought at first, or killed accidentally in a hot, sudden encounter, as most people believed now, was a thing which perhaps would never be cleared up. The guilty man (if he was guilty) had paid the penalty of his deed in exile, in poverty, in misery, ever since. His life had been as much broken off at that point as Stanton's was who died—and the two families had been equally plunged into woe and mourning ; though indeed it was the Musgraves who suffered most, by reason of the stigma put upon them, by the shame of John's flight and of his marriage, and by the fact that he was still a criminal pursued by justice, though justice had long slackened her pursuit. As for the Stantons, there was nobody to mourn much. Aunts and uncles and cousins console themselves sooner than fathers and mothers, and the boy brother, who had succeeded to the title, had been too young to be capable of sustained sorrow. Everybody at that time had sympathized with the young bride who had lost her future husband, and her coronet, and all the joys of life in this sudden and miserable way, for there was no concealing what the cause of the quarrel was, and that Lord Stanton had been unfaithful to the beautiful Mary. Nobody knew, however, the complication which gave her a double pang, the knowledge that not only the man who was her own property, her betrothed husband, but the man in whom, innocently in girlish simplicity, she had avowed herself to "take an interest," had preferred to her the village Lily, who was nobody and nothing, who had not been blameless between them, and whom everybody condemned. Everybody condemned : but *they* loved her. Both of them ! this secret and poignant addition to her trial Mary·Ridley never confided to any one, but it still thrilled through and through her at any allusion to that old long past tragedy. Both of them !—the man whose best love was due to her, and the man who had caught her own girlish

shy eyes, all unaware to either, somehow, innocently, unavowedly, in such a visionary way as harmed no one ; both ! It was hard. She wept for them both tenderly, abundantly, for the one not less than the other ; and a little—with a cry in her heart of protestation and appeal—for herself, put aside, thrown over for this woman who was nothing, who was nobody, yet who was better beloved than she. All this had welled up in Lady Stanton's heart when she saw the little girl who had Lily's face. She had been unable to restrain the sting of old wonder and pain ; the keen piercing of the old wound which she had felt to her heart. Both of them ! and now a little ghost of this Lily, her shadow, her representative, had come back again to look her in the face. She cried as she drove back that long silent way by herself to Elfdale. It was seldom she had the chance of being so long alone, and there was a kind of luxury about it, not unmixed with compunction and a sense of guilt.

For it still remains to be told how Mary Ridley came to be Lady Stanton, although Lord Stanton, who was the betrothed husband of her youth, had been killed, and all that apparently smooth and straightforward story had ended in grief and separation. She had married after some years a middle-aged cousin of her dead lover, Sir Henry Stanton, who had not long before come back from India where he had spent most of his life. It was but a poor fate for the beautiful Mary. Sir Henry had left his career and a full accomplished life behind him, when he first came to settle at Elfdale to the passive existence of a gentleman in the country, who could scarcely be called a country gentleman. He had been married and had children, a family of sons and daughters, and had only a second chapter of less vivid meaning, a sort of postscriptal life, to offer her. Why she had accepted him nobody could well say,—but she made him a good wife, kind, smiling, always gentle, though sadly put to it now and then to preserve unbroken the sweet good-temper with which nature had gifted her. So fair and sweet as she was, to get only the remains of a man's heart after all, to be made use of as their chaperon and caretaker by his big, unlovely daughters ; to have her own children, two dainty, lovely, fairy girls, kept in the background,—no more than “the little ones”—of no account

in the house—all these things were somewhat trying, and a strange reversal of all that life had seemed to promise her, and all that had been indicated by the early worship which surrounded her youth. But perhaps few women could have carried this inappropriate fate as well. All those contradictions of circumstances, all those travesties of what might have been, met with no gloom or sourness of disappointment in her. The very fact that she was Lady Stanton carried with it a certain aggravation, a parrot-like adhesion to the letter and change of the spirit, such as had been in the promises made to Macbeth. Mary might have thought herself the victim of a perverse fate, keeping the word of promise to the ear and breaking it to the heart, had she been perversely disposed—but instead of that, all her thoughts at the present moment were occupied with the fact that she had taken an unfair advantage of Laura and Lydia, in not telling them where she was going, that they might have come with her had they been so disposed. She had stolen a march upon them; they would think it unkind. But then she could not have gone to Penninghame had Laura and Lydia been with her. Though they were so much less concerned than she had been, they kept up the Stanton feud with the Musgraves. They had no “interest” in John—on the contrary, they were of the few who still believed that he had “murdered” Lord Stanton—and would have had him hanged if he ever returned to England. They would not have entered the house, or permitted any kind inquiries in their presence. And therefore it was that she had stolen away without letting them know, and was at present conscious—in addition to all the jumble of emotions in her heart—of a certain prick of guilt.

The Stantons were a great county family as well as the Musgraves, but in a very different way. When the Musgraves had been at their greatest, the Stantons had been nobody. They were nothing more than persistent, thrifty folk at first, adding field to field, building on ever a new addition to their old house. Then wealth had come, and then local importance ; and last of all celebrity. The first who brought anything like fame to the name, and introduced the race to the knowledge of the world, was a soldier, a general under the Duke of Marlborough, who

got a baronetcy and a reputation, and had a handsome new coat of arms invented for him—very appropriately gained indeed, on the field of battle, just as the augmentation of the Musgraves' blazon had been gained, but a few hundred years too late unfortunately, and therefore not telling for nearly so much as if it had been won in the fifteenth century. The next man was a lawyer, who so cultivated that profession that it brought his son, in the reign of the Georges, to the bench, and a peerage—and since that time the family had taken their place among the magnates of the north country. Young Walter Lord Stanton was a much greater man than John Musgrave, though not half so great a man in one sense of the word. Two or three generations, however, tell just as much upon the individual mind as twenty, and the young peer was conscious of all his advantages over the commoner, without any sense of inferiority in point of race. And now the other Lord Stanton, Geoffrey, who had succeeded that unfortunate young man, was the greatest personage of his years in the district, regarded with interest by all his neighbours and with more than interest-by some ; for was it not in his power to make one of his feminine contemporaries, however humble she might be by birth, and however poor in this world's goods, a great lady ?—and so long as human nature remains as it is, this cannot cease to be a very potent attraction. Indeed the wonder is that young women should not be altogether demoralized by the perpetual recurrence of such chances of undeserved, unearned elevation. Young Lord Stanton could do this. He could give fine houses and lands, a title, and all the good things of this earth to his cousin Laura, or his cousin Lydia, or any other girl in the county that pleased him. Therefore it cannot be wondered at if his appearance fluttered the dovecotes with sentiments as powerful and more pleasant than those which fill the nests at the appearance of predatory hawk or eagle. But any such flutter of feeling was held in Elfdale to be an unwarrantable impertinence on the part of the other ladies of the county. Long ago, at the time when at six years old he had succeeded to his stepbrother, there had been a tacit family understanding to the effect that one of Sir Henry's daughters should be the young lord's wife. Sir Henry, though.

old enough to have been the father of his murdered cousin, would have been his heir but for Geoff—and it was universally allowed to be hard upon him that when such an unlikely chance happened, as that young Lord Stanton should die, there should be this boy coming in the way forestalling his claim. Nobody had wanted that child who was suddenly turned into a personage of so much importance—not even his father, who had married with a single-minded idea of being comfortable in his own person, and who was much annoyed by the prospect of “a second family”—a prospect which was happily, however, cut short by his own speedy death. When therefore Walter Lord Stanton was killed, it was very generally felt that Sir Henry had a real grievance in the existence of the little stepbrother, who was in the way of everybody except his poor mother, whom the old lord had married to nurse him, and who had taken the unwarrantable liberty of adding little Geoffrey to the family. Poor little Geoff! he was bullied on all hands so long as his brother lived; and then, what a change came over his life and that of his mother, who was as pale and shy as her boy! Great good fortune may change even complexion, and Geoff as he grew to be a man was no longer pale. But Sir Henry never quite got over the blow dealt him by this succession. He had not resented Walter. Walter was so to speak the natural heir—and nobody expected him to die; but when he did die, so out of all calculation, to think there should be that boy! Sir Henry did not get over it for years—it was a positive wrong not to be forgotten.

Accordingly, as a small compensation to his injured feelings, all the family had tacitly decided that Geoff should marry one of his cousins. This, it is true, was but a very small compensation, for Sir Henry was not the kind of parent who lives in his children and is indifferent to his own glory and greatness. Even now, fifteen years after the event, he was not an old man, and it made up very poorly for his personal disappointment that Laura or Lydia should share the advancement of which he had been deprived. Still it was so understood. Geoff paid many holiday visits at Elfdale, though there was no particular friendship between Sir Henry and the widowed Lady Stanton, who was Geoff's guardian as well as his mother, and things were going

smoothly enough between the young people. They liked each other, and had no objection to be together as much as was possible, and already the sisters had settled between them "which of us it is to be." This Lydia, who was the most strong-minded, had thought desirable from the moment when she had become aware what was intended. "It does not matter at present," she said, "we are none of us in love, and one is just as good as another, but we had better draw lots, or something—or toss up, as the boys do." And what the mystic ordeal had been which decided this question we are unable to say, but decided it was in favour of Laura, who was the prettiest, and only a year younger than Geoff. Lydia, as soon as the die was cast, constituted herself the guardian of her sister's fortunes so far as the young lord was concerned, and made herself into a quaint and really pretty version of a matchmaking mother on Laura's behalf. Thus it will be seen that it was into the very heart of the opposite faction that Lady Stanton drove home with those tears in her soft eyes, and all that commotion of old thoughts in her heart. If they could have seen into it and known that it was the image of John Musgrave that had roused that commotion, what would these girls have said, towards whom she felt so guilty as having stolen a march upon them? "The murderer!" they would have cried with a shriek of horror. Lady Stanton could not, it is clear, have taken them to Penninghame with her, and surely she had a right to use her own horses and carriage; but still she felt guilty as she subdued, with all the effort she could make, the excitement in her heart.

When she went in, she retired at once upstairs, and announced herself, through her maid, to have a headache, and had a cup of tea in her own room, to which her own children, little Fanny and Annie, a pair of inseparables, came noiselessly like two doves on the wing. Annie and Fanny liked nothing in the world so much as to get mamma to themselves like this, in the stillness of her room, with everybody else shut out. One was ten and the other eleven; they were about the same height, had the same flowing curly locks of light brown hair, the same rose-tinted faces, walked in each other's steps, or rather flew about their little world of carpeted stairs and passages, together, always in sudden

soft flights—like doves, as we have said, on the wing. “Is your head very bad, mamma?” they said; and the gentle hypocrite blushed as she replied. No, it was not very bad; a little quiet would make it quite well. They took off her “things” for her, and brought her her soft white dressing-gown, in which she looked like the mother of all the doves, and let down her hair, which was not much darker, and quite as abundant as their own—and gave her her cup of tea, thus soothing every tingling nerve; and by this time Lady Stanton’s head was not bad at all, though now and then one of them would administer eau-de-cologne or rosewater. She told them of the children she had seen—little orphans who had no mother—and the two crept closer to her, to hear of that awful, incomprehensible desolation, each clasping an arm of hers with two small, eager hands. To be without a mother! Annie and Fanny held their breath in reverential silence and pity; but wondered a little that it was the little boy (“called Nello—what a funny name!”) that mamma spoke of, not the girl, who was ten (“just the same age as me”).

But not even the sympathy of her children, and the trance of interest which kept them breathless, could make Lady Stanton speak of the little girl. Her mother’s face! that face which had taken the best of everything in existence from Mary Ridley—how could Lady Stanton speak of it? She made some efforts to get over the feeling, but not with much success. But the rest restored her, and enabled her to appear, her headache quite charmed away, and her nerves still, at dinner. She took a little more care with her toilette than usual, by way of propitiation to the angry gods. And though Laura and Lydia were not much short of twenty years younger than their stepmother, it would have been an indifferent judge who had turned from her to them even in the fresh bloom of their youth. She came downstairs very conciliatory, ready to make the best of everything, and to make amends to them for all disloyal thoughts, and for having cheated them of their drive.

“I hope your head is better, my Lady,” said Laura. “We have been wondering all the afternoon wherever you had gone.”

The girls had a certain strain of vulgarity in them somehow, which could not be quite eradicated from their speech.

"I went out for a drive as usual," said Lady Stanton. "I thought I heard you say that you meant to walk."

"Oh yes ; we wanted to walk to the village to settle about the school children," said Laura ; and Lydia added, "But I am sure we never said so," and looked suspiciously at her step-mother.

"I went by the Langdale woods, and all the way to Penninghame water," said the culprit, very explanatory. "The lake looked so cold. I should not like to live near it. It chills all the landscape, and I am sure puts dreary thoughts into people's heads. And as I was there, Henry," she added, addressing her husband, "I did what you will think an odd thing." Lady Stanton's bosom heaved a little, and her breath came quick. It would have been far easier to say nothing about it ; but then she knew by experience that everything gets found out. She made a momentary pause before the confession which she tried to treat so lightly. "I ran in for a moment to the old Castle and saw Mary—Mary, you know. We were great friends, she and I, when we were young, and it was such a temptation passing the old place."

"What whim took you near the old place ?" said Sir Henry, gruffly. "I cannot think of any place in the world that should lie less in your way."

"Well, that is true," she said, breathing a little more freely now that the worst was told, "and the proof of it is that I have not been there for years."

"I hope it will be still longer before you go again," said her husband.

He did not say any more because of the servants, and because he had too much good sense to do or say anything that would lessen his wife's importance ; but he was not pleased, and this troubled her, for she had a delicate conscience. She looked at him wistfully, and was imprudent enough in her anxiety to pursue the subject, and make bad worse.

"It is strange to see an old friend whom you have known when you were young, after so many years," she said ; "though Mary is not so much altered as I am. You remember her, Henry ? She was always so pretty ; handsomer than—any one I know."

It was on her lips to say “handsomer than ever I was,” which was the real sentiment in her mind—a sentiment partly originating in the semi-guilt and humility produced by the consciousness of having grown stout, a kind of development which troubles women. She was very deeply aware of this, and it silenced all the claims of vanity. She had lost her figure; whereas Mary was still slim and straight as an arrow. Whatever might have been once, there was now no comparison between the two.

“Do you mean Miss Musgrave?” cried the girls, one after the other. “Miss Musgrave! that old creature—that old maid—that man’s sister?”

“She is no older than I am,” said Lady Stanton, with a flush on her face; “she was my dear friend in the old days. She is beautiful still, as much as she ever was, I think, and good; she has always been good.”

“That will do,” said Sir Henry interposing. “We need not discuss the family; but I think you will see, my dear, that there could not be much pleasure in any intercourse at this time of day—whatever might have been the case when you were young.”

“Intercourse—there could never be any intercourse,” cried Lydia, coming to the front. “Fancy, papa! intercourse with such people—after all that has happened! That would be tempting Providence; and it would be an insult to Geoff.”

“Let Geoff take care of his own affairs,” said Sir Henry, angrily; and he gave a forcible twist to the conversation, and threw it into another channel; but Lady Stanton was very silent all the evening afterwards. She had wanted to conciliate, and she had not succeeded; and how indeed could she, among her hostile family, keep up any intercourse with her old friend?

CHAPTER IX.

AT ELFDALE.

NEVERTHELESS this meeting could not be got out of Lady Stanton's mind. She thought of it constantly ; and in the stillness of her own room, when nobody but the little girls were by, she talked to them of the children, especially of little Nello, who had attracted her most. What a place of rest and refreshment that was for her, after all her trials with Laura and Lydia, and the seriousness of Sir Henry, who was displeased that she should have gone to Penninghame, and showed it in the way most painful to the soft-hearted woman, by silence, and a gravity which made her feel her indiscretion to her very heart. But notwithstanding Sir Henry's annoyance, she could not but relieve her mind by going over the whole scene with Fanny and Annie, who knew, without a word said, that these private talks in which they delighted—in which their mother told them all manner of stories, and took them back with her into the time of her youth, and made them acquainted with all her early friends—were not to be repeated, but were their own special privilege to be kept for themselves alone. They had already heard of Mary Musgrave, and knew her intimately, as children do know the early companions of whom an indulgent mother tells them, to satisfy their boundless appetite for narrative. “And what are they to Mary ?” the little girls asked, breathless in their interest about these strange children. They had already been told ; but the relationship of aunt did not seem a very tender one to Annie and Fanny, who knew only their father's sisters, old ladies to whom the elder girls, children of the first marriage, seemed the only legitimate and correct Stantons, and who looked down upon these little interlopers as unnecessary intruders. “Only their aunt !—is that all ?”

They were not in Lady Stanton's room this time, but seated on an ottoman in the great bow-window, one on either side of her. Laura and Lydia were out ; Sir Henry was in his library ; the coast was clear ; no one was likely to come in and dismiss the

children with a sharp word, such as—"Go away, little girls—there is no saying a word to your mother while you are there!" or "The little ones again! When we were children we were kept in the nursery." The children were aware now that when such speeches were made, it was better for them not to wait for their mother's half-pained, half-beseeching look, but to run away at once, not to provoke any discussion. They were wise little women, and were, by nature, of their mother's faction in this house, where both they and she, though she was the mistress of it, were more or less on sufferance. But at present everybody was out of the way. They were ready to fly off, with their pretty hair fluttering like a gleam of wings, should any of their critics appear; but the girls had gone a long way, and Sir Henry was very busy. It was a chance such as seldom occurred.

"All? when children have not a mother, their aunt is next best; sometimes she is even better—much better," said Lady Stanton, thinking in her heart that John's wife was not likely to have been of any great service to her children. "And Mary is not like any one you know. She is a beautiful lady—not old, like Aunt Rebecca—though Aunt Rebecca is always very kind. I hope you have not forgotten those beautiful sashes she gave you."

"I don't think very much of an aunt," said Fanny, who was the saucy one, with a shrug of her little shoulders.

"It must be different," said Annie, hugging her mother's arm. They were not impressed by the happiness of those poor little stranger children in being with Mary. "Has the little girl got no name, mamma—don't you know her name? You say Nello; but that is the boy; though it is more like a girl than a boy."

"It is German—or something—I don't remember. The little girl is called Liliæ. Oh yes, it is a pretty name enough, but I don't like it. I once knew one whom I did not approve of—"

"We knew," said Fanny, nodding her head at Annie, who nodded back again; "Mamma, we knew you did not like the little girl."

"I! not like her! Oh, children, how can you think me so unjust? I hope I am not unjust," cried Lady Stanton, almost with tears. "Mary is very proud of her little niece. And she

is very good to little Nello. Yes, perhaps I like him best, but there is no harm in that. He is a delightful little boy. If you could have had a little brother like that——”

“We have only—big brothers,” said Annie, regretfully; “that is different.”

“Yes, that is different. You could not imagine Charley with long, fair curls, and a little tunic, could you? This made the children laugh, and concealed a little sigh on their mother’s part; for Charlie was a big dragoon, and Lady Stanton foresaw would not have too much consideration, should they ever require his help, for the little sisters whom he undisguisedly felt to be in his way.

“I wonder if she wishes he was a little girl.”

“I wonder! How she must want to have a sister! A little brother would be very nice, too; we used to play at having a little brother; but it would not be like Fanny and me. Does she like being at the Castle, mamma?”

It troubled Lady Stanton that they should think of nothing but this little girl. It was Lilius that had won their interest, and she could not tell them why it was that she shrank from Lilius. “They have left their poor papa all alone and sad,” she said, in a low voice. “I used to know him too. And it must make them sad to think of him so far away.”

Once more the children were greatly puzzled. They were not on such terms of tender intimacy with their father as were thus suggested, but, on the whole, were rather pleased than otherwise when he was absent, and did not follow him very closely with their thoughts. They were slightly humbled as they realized the existence of so much greater susceptibility and lovingness on the part of the little girl in whom they were so much interested, than they themselves possessed. How she surpassed them in this as well as in other things! She talked German as well as English (if it was German; their mother was not clear what language it was)—think of that! So perhaps it was not wonderful that she should be so much fonder of her papa. And a moment of silence ensued. Lady Stanton did not remark the confused pause in the minds of her children, because her own mind was filled with wistful compassion for the lonely man whom she had been

thinking of more or less since ever she left Penninghame. Where was he, all alone in the world, shut out from his own house, an exile from his country—even his children away from him, in whom perhaps he had found some comfort?

This momentary silence was interrupted abruptly by the sound of a voice. “Are you there, Cousin Mary? and what are you putting your heads together about?”

At this sound, before they found out what it was, the children disengaged themselves suddenly each from her separate clinging to her mother’s arm, and approached each other as if for flight; but, falling back to their places when they recognized the voice, looked at each other, and said both together, with tones of relief, “Oh, it’s only Geoff!”

Nothing more significant of the inner life of the family, and the position of these two little intruders, could have been.

Geoff came forward with his boyish step and voice in all the smiling confidence of youth. “I thought I should startle you. Is it a story that is being told, or are you plotting something? Fanny and Annie, leave her alone for a moment. It is my turn now.”

“O Geoff! it is about a little girl and a boy—mamma will tell you too, if you ask her; and there’s nobody in. We thought at first you were papa, but he’s so busy. Come and sit here.”

Geoff came up, and kissed Lady Stanton on her soft, still beautiful cheek. He was a son of the house, and privileged. He sat down on the stool the children had placed for him. “I am glad there’s nobody in,” he said. “Of course the girls will be back before I go; but I wanted to speak to you—about something.”

“Shall the children go, Geoff?”

“Fancy! do you want them to hate me? No, go on with the story. This is what I like. Isn’t it pleasant, Annie and Fanny, to have her all to ourselves? Do you mind me?”

“Oh, not in the least, Geoff—not in the very least. You are like—what is he like, Annie?—a brother, not a big brother, like Charley: but something young, something nice, like what mamma was telling us of—a *little* brother—grown up——”

“Is this a sneer at my height?” he said; “but go on, don’t

let me stop the story. I like stories—and most other pleasant things."

"It was no story," said Lady Stanton. "I was telling them only of some children :—you are very good and forgiving, Geoff—but I fear you will be angry with me when you know. I was —out by myself—and notwithstanding all we have against them, I went to see Mary Musgrave. There! I must tell you at once, and get it over. I shall be sorry if it annoys you; but Mary and I," she said, faltering, "were such friends once, and I have not seen her for years."

"Why should I be annoyed—why should I be angry? I am not an avenger. Poor Cousin Mary! you were out—by yourself! —was that your only reason for going?"

"Indeed it is true enough. It is very seldom I go out without the girls: and they—feel strongly, you know, about that."

"What have they to do with it? Yes, I know: they are *plus royalistes que le roi*. But this is not the story."

"Yes, indeed it is, my dear boy. I was telling Annie and Fanny of two poor children. They belong to a man who is—banished from his own country. He did wrong—when he was young—oh so many, so many years ago!—and he is still wandering about the world without a home, and far from his friends. He was young then, and now—it is so long ago;—ah, Geoff, you must not be angry with me. The little children are with Mary. She did not tell me much, for her heart did not soften to me as mine did to her. But there they are; the mother dead who was at the bottom of it all; and nobody to care for them but Mary; all through something that happened before they were born."

Lady Stanton grew red as she spoke, her voice trembled, her whole aspect was full of emotion. The young man shook his head—

"I suppose a great many of us suffer from harm done before we were born," he said, gravely. "This is no solitary instance."

"Ah, Geoff, it is natural, quite natural, that you should feel so. I forgot how deeply you were affected by all that happened then."

"I did not mean that," he said, gravely. His youthful face had changed out of its light-hearted calm. "Indeed I had heard something of this, and I wanted to speak to you——"

"Run away, my darlings," said Lady Stanton; "go and see what—nurse is about. Make her go down with you to the village and take the tea and sugar to the old women in the almshouses. This is the day—don't you remember?"

"So it is," said Annie. "But we did not want to remember," said Fanny; "we liked better to stay with you."

However, they went off, reluctant yet obedient. They were used to being sent away. It was seldom their mother who did it, willingly—but everybody else did it with peremptory determination—and the little girls were used to obey. They untwined themselves from her arms, to which they had been clinging, and went away close together, with a soft rush and sweep as of one movement.

"There go the doves," said Geoff, looking after them with kind admiration like that of a brother. It pleased Lady Stanton to see the friendly pleasure in them which lighted the young man's eyes. Whoever married him, he would always, she thought, be a brother to her neglected children, who counted for so little in the family. She looked after them with that mother-look which, whether in joy or sorrow, is close upon tears. Then she turned to him with eyes softened by that unspeakable tenderness:

"Whatever you wish," she said. "Tell me, Geoff; I am ready to hear."

"I am as bad as the rest. You have to send them away for me too."

"There is some reason in it this time. If you have heard about the little Musgraves you know how miserable it all is," said Lady Stanton. "The old man will have nothing to say to them. He lets them live there, but takes no notice—his son's children! And Mary has everything upon her shoulders."

"Cousin Mary, will it hurt you much to tell me all about it?" said the young man. "Forgive me, I know it must be painful; but all that is so long over, and everything is so changed——"

" You mean I have married and forgotten," she said, her lips beginning to quiver.

" I scarcely remember anything about it," said Geoff, looking away from her that his eyes might not disturb her more, " only a confused sort of excitement and wretchedness, and then a strange new sense of importance. We had been nobodies till then—my mother and I. But I have heard a few things lately. Walter,—will it pain you if I speak of him ? "

" Poor Walter ! —no. Geoff, you must understand that Walter loved somebody else better than me."

She said this half in honest avowal of that humiliation which had been one of the great wonders of her life, partly in excuse of her own easy forgetfulness of him.

" I have heard that too, Cousin Mary, with wonder ; but never mind. He paid dearly for his folly. The other——"

" Geoff," said Lady Stanton, with a trembling voice, " the other is living still, and he has paid dearly for it all this time. We must not be hard upon him. I do not want to excuse him —it would be strange if I should be the one to excuse him ; but only——"

" I am very sorry for him, Cousin Mary. I am glad you feel as I do. Walter may have been in the wrong for anything I know. I do not think it was murder."

" That I am sure it was not ! John Musgrave was not the man to do a murder—oh, no, no ; Geoff ! he was not that kind of man ! "

Geoff looked up surprised at her eager tone and the trembling in her voice.

" You knew him—well ? " he said, with that indifferent composure with which people comment upon the past, not knowing what depths those are over which they skim so lightly. Could he have seen into the agitation in Lady Stanton's heart ! But he would not have understood nor realized the commotion that was there.

" I always—took an interest in him," she said, faltering ; and then she felt it her duty to do her best for him as an old friend. " I had known him all my life, Geoff, as well as I knew Walter. He was hasty and high-spirited, but so kind—he would have

gone out of his way to help any one. Before he saw that young woman everybody was fond of John."

"Did you know *her* too?"

"No, no; I did not know her. God forbid! She was the destruction of every one who cared for her," said Lady Stanton with a little outburst. Then she made an effort to subdue herself. "Perhaps I am not just to her," she said with a faint smile. "She was preferred to me, you know, Geoff; and they say a woman cannot forget that—perhaps it is true."

"How could he? was he mad?" Geoff said. Geoff was himself tenderly, filially in love with his cousin Mary. He thought there was nobody in the world so beautiful and so kird. And even now she was not understood as she ought to be. Sir Henry thought her a good enough wife, a faithful creature, perfectly trustworthy, and so forth. It was in this light that all regarded her. Something better than an upper servant, a little dearer than a governess; something to be made use of, to do everything for everybody. She who, Geoff thought in his enthusiasm, was more lovely and sweet than the youngest of them, and ought to be held pre-eminent and sacred by everybody round her. This was not the lot that had fallen to her in life.

"So I am not the best judge, you see," said Lady Stanton with a little sigh. "In those days one felt more strongly perhaps. It all seems so vivid and clear," she added half apologetically, though without entirely realizing how much light these half-confessions threw on her present state of less lively feeling, "that is the effect of being young——"

"I think you will always be young," he said tenderly; then added after a pause, "Was it a quarrel about—the woman?—" He blushed himself as he said so, feeling the wrong to her—yet only half knowing the wonder it was in her thoughts, the double pain it brought.

"I think so. They were both fond of her; and Walter ought not to have been fond of her. John—was quite free. He was in no way engaged to any one. He had a right to love her if he pleased. But Walter interfered, and he was richer, greater, a far better match. So I suppose she wavered. This is my own explanation of it. They met then when their hearts were wild

against each other, and there was a struggle. Ah, Geoff! Has it not cost John Musgrave his life as well as Walter? Has he ever ventured to show himself in his own country since? And now their poor little children have come home to Mary; but he will never be able to come home."

"It is hard," said Geoff thoughtfully. "I wish I knew the law. Fifteen years is it? I was about six then. Could anything be done? I wonder if anything could be done."

She put her hand on his shoulder with an affectionate caressing touch, "Thanks for the thought, my dear boy—even if nothing could be done."

"You take a great deal of interest in him, Cousin Mary?"

"Yes," she said quickly; "I told you we were all young people together; and his sister was my dear friend. We were called the two Maries in those days. We were thought—pretty," she said with a vivid blush and a little laugh. "You may have heard?"

Geoff kissed the pretty hand which had been laid on his shoulder, and which was perhaps a little fuller and more dimply than was consistent with perfection. "I have eyes," he said, with a little of the shyness of his years, "and I have always had a right as a Stanton to be proud of my cousin Mary. I wonder if Miss Musgrave is as beautiful as you are; I don't believe it for my part."

"She is far prettier—she is not stout," said Lady Stanton with a sigh; and then she laughed, and made her confession over again with a half-jest, which did not make her regret less real, "and I have lost my figure. I have developed, as people say. Mary is as slim as ever. Ah, you may laugh, but that makes a great difference; I feel it to the bottom of my heart."

Geoff looked at her with tender admiration in his eyes. "There has never been a time when I have not thought you the most beautiful woman in all the world," he said, "and that all the great beauties must have been like you. You were always the dream of fair women to me—now one, now the other—all except Cleopatra. You never could have been like that black-browed witch——"

"Hush! boy. I am too old to be flattered now; and I

am stout," she said, with that faint laugh of annoyance and humiliation just softened by jest. Geoff's honest praise brought no blush to her soft matronly cheeks, but she liked it, as it pleased her when the children called her "Pretty Mamma." They loved *her* the best, though people had not always done so. The fact that she had grown stout did not affect their admiration. Only those who have known others to be preferred to themselves can realize what this is. After a moment's hesitation, she added in a low voice : "I wonder—will you go and see them ? It would have a great effect in the neighbourhood. Oh, Geoff, forgive me if I am saying too much ; perhaps it would not be possible, perhaps it might be wrong in your position. You must take the advice of somebody more sensible, less affected by their feelings. Everybody likes you, Geoff, and you deserve it, my dear ; and you are Lord Stanton. It would have a great effect upon the county ; it would be almost like clearing him——"

"Then I will go—at once—this very day," said Geoff, starting up.

"Oh no, no, no," she said, catching him by the arm ; "first of all you must speak to—some one more sensible than me."

CHAPTER X.

THE OTHER SIDE.

WHILE Lady Stanton spread the news of the arrival of the Musgrave children among the upper classes, this information was given to the lower, an equally or perhaps even more important influence in their history, by an authority of a very different kind, to whom, indeed, it would have been bitter to think that she was the channel of communication with the lower orders. But such is the irony of circumstances that it was Mrs. Pennithorne, who prided herself upon her gentility, and who would have made any sacrifice rather than descend to a sphere beneath her, who conveyed the report, which ran through the village like

wildfire, and which spread over the surrounding country as rapidly and effectually as if it had been made known by beacons on the hill-tops. The village was more interested in the news than any other circle in the county could be, partly because the reigning house in a village is its standing romance, the drama most near to it, and most exciting when there is any drama at all ; and partly for still more impressive personal reasons. The Castle had done much for the district in this way, having supplied it with more exciting food in the way of story and incident than any other great house in the north country. There had been a long interval of monotony, but now it appeared to all concerned that the more eventful circle of affairs was about to begin again. The manner in which the story fully reached the village was simple enough. Mrs. Pennithorne had, as might have been expected, failed entirely with Mary's frock. It would not "come" as she wanted it to come, let her do what she would ; and when all her own efforts had failed, and the stuff was effectually spoiled, soiled, and crumpled, and incapable of ever looking better than second-hand under any circumstances, she called in the doctor, as people are apt to do when they have cobbled at themselves in vain. The dress doctor in Penninghame and the neighbourhood, the rule of fashion, the grand authority for everything in the way of *chiffons*, was a certain Miss Price, a lively little old woman, who had one of the best houses in the village, where she let lodgings on occasion, but always made dresses. She had been in business for a great many years, and was an authority both up and down the water. It was not agreeable to Miss Price to be called in at the last moment, as it were, to heal the ailments of Mary's frock ; but partly because it was the clergyman's house, and partly because of the gossip which was always involved, she obeyed the summons, as she had done on many previous occasions. And she did her best, as Mrs. Pennithorne had done her worst, upon the little habiliment. "Ladies know nothing about such things," the little dressmaker said, pinning and unpinning with energetic ease and rapidity. And the Vicar's wife, who looked on helpless but admiring, accepted the condemnation because of the flattery involved ; for Mrs. Pen was elevated over Miss Price by so brief an interval

that this accusation was a kind of acknowledgment of her gentility, and did her good, though it was not meant to be complimentary. She liked to feel that hers was that ladylike uselessness which is only appropriate to high position. She simpered a little, and avowed that indeed she had never been brought up to know about such things ; and while Miss Price put the spoiled work to rights the Vicar's wife did her best to entertain the beneficent fairy who was bringing the chaos into order. She did not blurt out suddenly the news with which she was overbrimming, but brought it forth cunningly in the course of conversation in the most agreeable way.

"Is there any news, Miss Price ?" she said ; "but I tell the Vicar that nothing ever happens here. The people don't even die."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am. There's two within the last three months ; but to be sure they were long past threescore and ten."

"That is what I say. It's so healthy at Penninghame. Look at the old Squire now, how hale and hearty he is—and after all he has come through."

"Yes, he has come through a deal," said Miss Price, putting her pins in her mouth, "and that's too true."

"Poor old man ; and still more and more to put up with. Have you seen the children, Miss Price ? Oh dear ! didn't you know ? Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it ; but people cannot hide up children as they hide secrets. I have been living here for ten years, and I scarcely know the rights of the story about John Musgrave yet."

"Children !" said Miss Price, with a start which shook the pins out of her fingers. "To be sure—that came in a coach from Pennington with a play-acting sort of a woman ? But what has that to do with Mr. John ?"

The dressmaker dropped Mary's frock upon her knees in the excitement of her feelings. There was more than curiosity involved. "To be sure," she said. "To be sure !" going on with her own thoughts, "where should they come but to the Castle ? and who should have them but his family ? 'Lizabeth Bampfylde is an honest woyman, but not even me, I wouldn't trust the children to her. His children ! though they would be hers too——"

"What do you mean, Miss Price?" said Mrs. Pen, half offended; "are you going out of your senses? I tell you something about the Squire's family, and you get into a way about it as if it could be anything to you."

Miss Price recovered her composure with a rapid effort, but her little pale countenance reddened.

"Nothing to me, ma'am," she said, with what she felt to be a proper pride. "But if Mr. John has children, they had a mother as well as a father; and there was a time when that was something to me."

"Oh!" cried the Vicar's wife, "then you knew Mrs. John? tell me about her. She was a low girl, that is all I know."

"She was no low girl, whoever told you," cried the little dressmaker. "She was one as folks were fond of, as fond as if she had been a princess. She was no more low than—I am; she was——"

"Oh, I did not mean to offend you, Miss Price. Of course I know how respectable you are—but not the equal of the Squire, you know, or of——"

Miss Price looked at the woman who had spoiled Mary's frock. There she stood, limp, and faded, and genteel, with no capacity in her fingers and not much in her head, with a smile of conscious superiority yet condescension. Miss Price was not her equal. "Good Lord! as if I would be that useless," she said to herself, "for all the money in the world! or to be as grand as the Queen!" But though she was at once exasperated and contemptuous, politeness and policy at once forbade her to say anything. She would not "set up her face to a lady," even when so very unimpressive as Mrs. Pennithorne; and it did not become the dressmaker in the village to be openly scornful of the Vicar's wife. She saved herself by taking up again with energy and devotion the scattered pins and the miserable little spoiled bodice of Mary's frock.

"I am glad you know about this girl," said Mrs. Pen, satisfied to have subdued her opponent, "for I want so much to hear about her. One cannot get much information from a gentleman, Miss Price. They tell you, 'Oh yes, she was a pretty creature!' as if that is all you cared to know."

"It's what tells most with the gentlemen, ma'am," said Miss Price, recovering her composure. "Yes, that she was. I've looked at her many a time and said just the same to myself. 'Well, you are a pretty creature!' I don't wonder if their heads get turned when they are as pretty as that; though it isn't only the pretty ones that get their heads turned. The girls that I've had through my hands! and not one in ten that went through with the business and kept it up as it ought to be kept up."

"Was Mrs. John Musgrave in the business? Was she in your hands? I declare! Did he marry her from your house?"

"She was come of wild folks," said Miss Price; "there was gipsy blood in them. They had a little bit of a sheep farm, up among the hills in their best days, and a lone house, where there wasn't a stranger to be seen twice in a year. 'Lizabeth Bampfylde, that's her mother, comes about the village still. I can't tell you what she does, she sells her eggs and chickens, and maybe she does tell fortunes. I won't say. She never told me mine. I took a fancy to the lass, and I said, 'Bring her to me. I'll take her; I'll train her a bit.' Oh, how little we know! If I had but let her bide on the fells!—but what a pretty one she was! Such eyes as she had; and a skin that wasn't to say dark—it was brown, but so clear! like the water when the sun is in it."

"You seem to think a great deal of people being pretty."

"So I do, ma'am, more than I ought. A woman should have more sense. I'm near as easy led away as the gentlemen. But there's different kinds of beauty, and that is what *they* never see as want it most. There's pretty faces that I can't abide. They seem to give me a turn. Now that's where the men fails," said the little dressmaker; "all's one to them, good or bad, they never see any difference. Lily was never one of the bad ones, poor dear. Lily? yes, that was the young woman; but she's not such a young woman, not a girl now. She'll be thirty-seven or eight, close upon that, if she's living this day."

"She is not living—she died five years ago; and Miss Musgrave won't believe me that she ought to go into black for her," said Mrs. Pennithorne.

"Ah!" said Miss Price with a sharp cry. She dropped her work at her feet with an indifference to it which deeply aggrieved

Mrs. Pen. The announcement took her altogether by surprise, and went to her heart. "Dead! oh my poor Lily, my poor Lily! Was I thinking ill o' thee? Dead! and so many left—and her in her prime!" Sudden sobs stopped the good little woman's speech, with which she struggled as she went on, making a brave effort to recover herself as she picked up the little dress. "I beg your pardon, ma'am, but it was so sudden; it took me unprepared. Oh, ma'am, that's the worst of it when you have to do with girls. Few of them go through with the business, though it would be best for them; they turn every one to her own way; that's Scripture, but I mean it. They marry, and they think themselves so grand with their children, and it kills 'em. Oh, if I had but left her on the fells! or if she had stuck by the business like me!"

"I did not think you took so much interest in her," said Mrs. Pen, feeling guilty. "If I had known you cared, I would have been more careful what I said. But nobody seemed to think much of *her*. It is always the Musgraves the Vicar speaks of."

"The Vicar thought of nothing but Miss Mary," said Miss Price hastily; then she corrected herself, "I mean of womanfolk," she said; "the Musgraves, ma'am, as you say, that was all he thought of. And that's always the way, as far as I can judge. The gentry thinks of their own side, and we that are but small folks, we think of ours; it's natural. Miss Musgrave was not much to me. I never made her but one thing, and that was a cotton, a common morning frock; she was too grand to have her things made by the likes of me; but Lily, she sat by my side and sewed at the same seam. And she's dead! the bonniest lass on all the water, as the village folks say."

"You don't talk like the village folks, Miss Price."

"No. I'm from the south, as they call it—except when a word creeps in now and again through being so long here. It's all pinned and straight, ma'am, now. It was done almost before I heard the news—and I'm glad of it, for my eyesight goes when I begin to cry. I don't think you can go wrong now," said Miss Price with a sigh, knowing the powers of her patroness in that direction. "It's as well as I can make it—pinned and basted, and straight before your hand. No, thank you kindly, nothing

for me. I'm that put out that the best thing I can do is to get home."

"But dear me, Miss Price—as she is not even a relation!"

"A relation, what's that? A girl that you've brought up is more than a relation," cried the dressmaker, forgetting her manners. And she made up her patterns tremulously in a little bundle, and hurried out with the briefest leavetaking, which was not civil, Mrs. Pennithorne said indignantly. But Miss Price, in her way, was as important as the Vicar's wife herself, being alone in her profession, and enjoying a monopoly. It is possible to be rude, when you are a monopolist, without damage to your trade; but this, to do her justice, was not the motive which actuated the little dressmaker, who, in her nature, was anxiously polite, and indisposed to offend any one; but the news she had heard was too much for all her little decorums. She made a long round out of her way to pass by the Castle, though she could scarcely tell why she did so—for it was not the children that were most in her mind. Indeed she scarcely remembered them at all, in her excitement of pain and hot grief which took the shape of a kind of fiery resentment against life and nature. Children! what was the good of the children—helpless things that took a woman's life, and made even the rest of death bitter to her, wringing her heart with misery to leave them after costing her her life! She was an old maid not by accident, but by nature; and what were a couple of miserable little children in exchange for the life of Lily? But when, not expecting to see them, not thinking of them save in this bitter way, Miss Price saw the two children at the door of the hall, another quick springing sensation rose suddenly in her hasty soul. She went slowly past, gazing at them, trying to say to herself that she hated the sight of them, Lily's slayers! But her kind heart was too much for her quick temper, and as soon as they were out of sight, the little dressmaker sat down by the wayside and cried, sobbing like a child. Little dreadful creatures, who had worn their mother to death, and killed her in her prime! Poor little forlorn orphans, without a mother! She did not know which feeling was the warmest and strongest. But she reached home so shaken between the two emotions, that her present assistant,

who filled the place to which Miss Price had hoped to train Lily, and who was a good girl with no nonsense in her head, fully intending to go through with the business, was frightened by the appearance of her principal, who stumbled into the little parlour all garlanded with paper patterns, with tremulous step and blanched cheeks, as if she had seen a ghost.

"Something's to do!" cried the girl.

Miss Price made no immediate reply, but sank into a chair to get her breath.

"Oh nothing; nothing you know of," she said at last, "nothing that need trouble you;" and then after a pause, "nothing that will warn you even, not one of you, silly things. You'd all do just the same to-morrow, though it was to cost you your lives."

"I'll run and get you a cup of tea," said Sarah, which showed her to be a young woman of sense. Where lives the woman to whom this cordial, promptly and as it were accidentally administered, does not do good? Miss Price gradually recovered herself as she sipped the fragrant tea, and told her story with many sighs and lamentations, yet not without a certain melancholy pleasure.

"If girls would only think," she said; "if they would take a warning; but ne'er a one of you will do that. You think it's grand to marry a gentleman; but it would be far better to go through with the business like I've done, far better! though you'll never think so."

Sarah was respectfully sympathetic; she shook her head with a look of awe and melancholy acquiescence; but nevertheless she did not think so. She was only twenty, and thirty-seven was a good age. To marry a gentleman, even at the risk of dying at thirty-seven like Lily, was better than living till sixty like Miss Price; but she did not say so. She acquiesced, and even cried over the lost Lily, whom she had never seen, with the easy emotion of a girl. She herself meant sincerely to go through with the business; but anyhow Sarah was as much excited by the news as heart could desire. Miss Price was very determined that it should not be talked of, that the story should not be spread in the village. "Don't let them say *again* it came from us," she said; but however that might be, before the next morning it had

spread through the parish, and beyond the parish. Such things get into the atmosphere. What can conceal a secret? It is the one thing certain to be found out, and which every one is bound to know. There was nothing else talked about in the cottages or when neighbours met, for some days. The men talked of it over their beer, even, in the public-houses. "She were a bonnie lass," the elder ones said; and all the girls in the district felt that they individually might have been Lily, and felt sad for her. The children (who could not be hid) were followed by eager looks of curiosity when they appeared, and the resemblance of Lilia to her mother was too remarkable not to strike every one who had known her; and the entire story which had excited the district so deeply in its time, and which, with its mixture of all the sentiments which are most interesting to humanity, was almost as exciting still as ever, was retold, a hundred times over, for the benefit of the younger generation. In these lower regions, as was natural, the interest all centred in the beautiful girl, who, though "come of wild folk," and not even an appropriate bride for a well-to-do hopeful of the village, had "the offer of" two gentlemen, one the young lord, and the other the young squire. Had such fortune ever come before to a lass from the fells? How she had been courted! not as the village lovers wooed with a sense of equality, at least, if not perhaps something more; but John Musgrave and young Lord Stanton had thought nobody in the world like her. And the young lord, poor fellow! had even broken his word for her, a sin which was but a glory the more to Lily in the eyes of the village critics—however bitterly it might have been condemned had his forsaken bride been a village maiden too. That this rivalry should have gone the length of blood, all for Lily's sweet looks, was a thing the middle-aged narrators shook their heads over with many a moral, "You see what the like of that comes to, lasses," they said. But the lasses only put their heads closer, and felt their hearts beat higher. To be fought for, to be died for! It was terrible, no doubt, but glorious. "Such things never happen nowadays" they said to themselves with a sigh.

And the news did not stop down below in the plain, but mounted with the winds and the clouds, and reached lone places

in the fells, where it raised a wilder excitement still—at least in one melancholy and solitary place.

CHAPTER XI.

AN AFTERNOON'S WORK.

“ You must not cry, Nello ; for one thing you are too big to cry ; or if you are not too big you are too old. You are eight—past ! and then the old gentleman downstairs is such a funny, funny old man, that he will eat us, Nello, if we make a noise.”

“ I don't believe you,” said the little boy, whom England had much improved in strength. “ Old men do not eat children,” but he drew back a little, and stopped crying all the same.

“ We do not know no-ting about old men in England,” said Liliias—the *th* was still a difficulty to her ; and they both pronounced their *rs* in a way which was unfamiliar to English ears, though the letter exists and retains its natural sound in the north country. “ They are very very strange ; they sit in a chair all day, like the wild beasts. I go to the door and peep in. He has no cap on his head like Don Pepé, but a bare place here, where the cap should be, and white hair. And he never moves nor speaks. Sometimes I think he will be cut out of wood ; and then all at once he rises up,—and me, I run away.”

“ Are you not afraid, Liliias ? I should be frightened,” said the little boy, looking at her with large wondering eyes.

“ That is because you are only eight, but I am twelve, and one is never frightened after twelve. I run away, and it makes me beat and thump here,” Liliias put her hand to her heart to indicate the place, “ and I like it.”

“ Yes,” said the little brother, “ when you run it makes that beat ; but I do not like it.”

“ Ah, you are a baby,” said Liliias. She stood with her dark hair shaken back, and her eyes shining, an image of visionary daring. Nothing could be more unlike than these two children. The boy had all the features of his race, blue eyes, fair hair, with

a touch of gold in it, a fair complexion, browned and reddened, indeed, with his long journey and the warm sun he had been used to, but already changing into the pink and white of English childhood. But there were none of the Musgrave features in Liliás. Her dark eyes, dancing with life and energy, her warm colour, clear brown with an underlying rose tint, and a downy bloomy surface which softened every outline, and her crisp, yet shining dark hair, all belonged, not only to a different species, but to a different type of race. The Musgraves were robust and strong, but their strength was not of this buoyant kind. The cloud of anxiety which had been about her on her first appearance, that mystery of doubt with which a little human creature regards the strange and novel, in whatever form, not knowing if harm or good may be coming, had floated away, and Liliás had already taken back her natural character. She was at home in the house, every room of it, though she knew that she was hidden and thrust into corners, on account of "the old gentleman downstairs." This did not depress or trouble her, but felt like a joke, a mystification and masquerading such as is dear to childhood. She threw herself into the spirit of it with enjoyment, instead of brooding over it with melancholy consciousness, which was what Mary, forgetting childhood, as all grown people do, had feared.

The children were in the hall, which had now grown so familiar to them that they could not understand how they had ever feared it. It was one of those exceptional days which occur now and then in the winter before the turn of the year. The whole world was full of sunshine. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the great green hill in front of them rose up in dazzling clearness of relief, like a visible way of ascent into heaven. There was not a breath stirring; the trees, without a leaf upon them, printed themselves against the blue of the sky and the green of the hill, in minute perfection of branch and twig, like a photograph. The lake was as still and as blue as the sky—everything lay in the sunshine charmed and stilled, hanging motionless as it were between earth and heaven. The sense that it was mid-winter, the natural season of storms, seemed to have got into the air, which wondered over its own stillness,

and into the skies, which excelled themselves in lightness and soft blueness, snatching this moment of delight with a fearful joy. Earth took that ecstasy as one who was well aware that she could not answer for the morrow. The great doorway of the hall stood wide open; it was after mid-day, and the sun streamed in, having got to the west so much earlier than in summer. Lilias and her little brother, children of the sun, were planted in the midst of it, enjoying it with unconscious exhilaration. Martuccia sat in the open doorway, basking in it, knitting; a tranquil, almost motionless figure, with that faculty of repose which is no doubt awarded to nurses in compensation for the endless calls upon their activity. She had put a little tartan shawl—congenial garment—upon her fine shoulders, and, with her silver pins and glowing black hair all whitened by the sunshine, sat perfectly motionless except for the little rustle of her hands and click of her knitting-needles. It seemed immaterial whether it might be years or moments that the robust and comely watcher should hold that peaceful guardian place. She was paying no attention to the children, yet the lightest appeal, a querulous exclamation, a longer pause than usual, anything or nothing, would have brought her to her nurselings. It was the repose of the mother, who sees everything and feels everything, even when she does not see: and the additional security which her presence brought to them, though she sat apart and had nothing to do with their talk or their play, the strong support of the background which she made, it would be hard to tell in words. They had been playing in the spacious place, all lighted and warmed through and through with sunshine. Miss Musgrave had not yet made her appearance; either she had less time to spend in her favourite resort, or the fact that it had been appropriated to the children, as specially suitable in its size and separateness for their enjoyment, had made her relinquish its use. The great bay window in the recess gave back a reflected light from the shining of the lake, which added a colder tone to the prevailing brightness; and in the old fireplace there burned a smouldering fire, half coals half wood. Every feature of the place had grown familiar to the two little things who were once so alarmed by its dark corners—so familiar that they could not

understand how they had ever been afraid. The kind old spacious silent hall sheltered them with a large passive protection not unlike that of Martuccia herself.

But the afternoon languor had stolen upon the boy and girl, notwithstanding the brightness. They had come to a pause in their round of amusement, and though half-tired, were yet looking about with all their quick senses for some new delight. A little scuffle, a little quarrel and crying fit on Nello's part, which had been put a stop to by the warning of Lilius already recorded, had left them free for a new start, but not with the old plays, which were worn out for the moment. They made an unconscious pause, and looked about them to find some novelty; and both pounced upon one at the same moment with a burst of sudden and unlooked-for rapture. A great broad sheet of something white lay stretched out on Mary's table, in company with an open colour-box and brushes—a sight too tempting to be resisted by any child, especially after the exhaustion of a long day's play. It was wonderful that they had overlooked it so long. They caught sight of it simultaneously now, and the result was a sudden rush of eager curiosity. The boy got first to the goal; perhaps he had been by a second of time the first to start. He grasped one side of the white sheet with his hot little hand, and climbing into the chair which stood before it, threw himself upon the new wonder. "It is Mary's," said Lilius, making a feeble effort to hold him back; but her own curiosity was much stronger than her sense of duty to Mary, who allowed them to see everything and share everything she had. They both leant over the table breathless, the mysterious whiteness crackling beneath their hands. It was a sheet of dazzling white vellum, ornamented with what they considered beautiful pictures, a puzzling, yet a tempting sight to the children. It was nothing less than a genealogical tree, their own pedigree, which Miss Musgrave, skilled in such works, was preparing for her father, ornamented with emblazoned coats of arms, some of them unfinished and inviting completion with a seductive force which made the children's hearts beat.

"What is it?" said Nello, in a tone of awe.

"I know," said Lilius, confidently; "it is a copy. You have

had no education, you don't know what a copy is : but me, I have done them, though never any so pretty as this. Mary is a grown-up lady, old, not like us ; it must be Mary's copy. You should not touch it, you are too little."

"I will try," cried Nello, with his eyes upon the brushes. Already he had rubbed against something not yet dry, and had smudged the colour, to the horror of his sister. He had both his elbows upon it and the greater part of his small person.

"Oh, what have you done, you naughty boy !" cried Lilius ; "you cannot do it. Let me !"

"Yes, I will do it, I will do it !" cried Nello, seizing the crackling vellum and dashing at it with a brush full of colour. Lilius had to stand and look on, sorest of miseries, while her little brother performed badly what she felt she could have done well. There was a large shield in the centre, upon which the cherished "augmentation," the chief ornament of the Musgrave arms, was slightly drawn. Gules on a shield argent, it ought to have been—Nello made a blurred dash of bright blue, surrounded by a sea of red. "How it is pretty !" he cried in his half-foreign speech, with a crow of triumph. Colour upon colour ! and such colour ! the sight would have driven Mr. Musgrave wild.

Lilius uttered a cry of horror ; but the work of destruction was very captivating. Close to the vellum was the original draught of the genealogical tree, from which Mary had been copying. Lilius took possession of this, and carried it away to the table in the recess. She meant only to look at it, but the temptation was too much for her. At the bottom of the page an escutcheon void of all colour gradually caught her eye, a little white space which might be made, she thought, to resemble the others with great advantage to the whole. That this came opposite to the name of John Musgrave was nothing to the child, but the sight of it wrought her by degrees into a sort of creative frenzy. She would not spoil it as Nello was doing, but to complete what was wanting could be no harm. Lilius took a brush and filled it with fine broad vermillion, a colour about which there could be no mistake, and painted the vacant shield a strong decided gules, safe from any accident. The outline was not very firm, and there were overflowings and runs of

colour outside, but at all events the hue was undeniable. She was standing looking at it with a satisfied yet agitated mind, with the brush still in her hand, when her elbow was grasped by some one behind and a hand laid on her shoulder. In the start she gave, the child's arm made a nervous jerk of the brush over the paper, and ran a tremulous line of red over some half-dozen of the kindred names. "Mary!" she cried with a sudden perception of wrong-doing. But Lilius did not weep or excuse herself. She got quite pale, with a red spot on each cheek, and stood, not even dropping the brush, looking up at her judge, with the corners of her mouth suddenly turned downwards, and a gleam of awakened understanding in her alarmed eyes.

"Lilius! I thought I could trust you; what have you been doing?" cried Mary. "And Nello?" she added, looking round with dismay at the more important work. Nello had already been roused to that instinctive sense of harm which comes with the arrival of an aggrieved person. But he did not face his victim as Lilius did. He threw down his streaming pencil on the vellum, got down from his chair in the twinkling of an eye, and fled to take shelter with Martuccia, who, ever ready to defend, and yet unaware who was wrong, put an arm round him at once and faced Miss Musgrave with prompt defiance.

"Oh Mary!" cried Lilius, trembling, "Nello did not mean it. He is so little. Nello did not know."

Mary was not so angelically sweet as to be indifferent to the damage done, but she had not the freedom of reproof which people exercise with children familiar to them. The little meddlers were still strangers. So she restrained herself and said nothing. She went to the parchment and began to sponge off the still wet colour. Nello kept in his refuge regarding her from afar, ready to bolt behind Martuccia if she made any hostile advances and hide himself in his nurse's skirt. But Lilius followed Miss Musgrave closely as her shadow. She watched the sponging with the gravest anxious attention. She kept herself close against Mary's dress, touching it, and put herself in Mary's way, and interposed her wistful face, now quite pale and troubled, between the vellum and Mary's eyes. At last her aunt said, perhaps somewhat peevishly, "What do you want, child?

You have done harm enough for one morning. Pray go out of my way."

"Have we done much harm?" said Lilius, with strained and anxious eyes.

"Yes; you have spoiled my week's work, you mischievous children," said Mary, melting a little. "I shall have to do it over again. I did not expect this, Lilius, from you."

"It was very, very bad of me," said the child, with perfect seriousness, her eyes slowly filling; "but Nello is such a little fellow—he did not know——"

"Then why did you do it, Lilius?"

The child looked up searchingly into her face. "I think it must have been the devil," she said, with portentous gravity, drawing a heavy sigh.

An impulse of laughter came to Miss Musgrave in the midst of her annoyance; but partly she restrained it for high moral reasons, and partly she was still too much annoyed to give way to laughter. "What do you know about—the devil?" she said. "I think it was your own little mischievous hands, and your curiosity."

"Oh, I know a great deal about him. Mr. Pennithorne told us on Sunday; and Martuccia must be of the same religion as Mr. Pen, for she worships him too," said Lilius, aware of the advantages of digression when things were so serious as they were now.

"Worships him, Lilius! You must not use such words."

"They are always thinking of him, and they say he does everything. They are very, very afraid of him," said Lilius seriously, "and so am I—he can do whatever he pleases; but I cannot think he is as strong as God."

"And it was he who made you spoil my papers——?"

"Oh, Mary, not Nello—only me. Nello is such a little fellow, he did not mean it—he did not know what he was doing——"

"And did you?"

Lilius pressed very close against Mary's side. Her heart was beating loudly in her brave little bosom. Her sense of crime had not been lightened by the postponement of the punishment

which must, she thought, be coming. But it was not in her to fly as her brother had done. She took a furtive hold of Mary's gown. No hope of any forgiveness was in her serious soul ; yet to whom could she cling in earth and heaven but only to this inflictor of stern justice ? She kept her eyes fixed on Mary's face, that she might see the fearful doom which was coming—that would always be a help in bearing it—and kept close to her, pressing against her. "*Aie-tu peur de moi ? cache-toi dans mes bras*"—this was the child's impulse in her penitence and terror.

Mary forgot her vellum and its stains. She put her arm round the child, whose eyes opened a little wider thinking the judgment was coming, but who never shrank. "You will not do it again," she said. Lilius could not understand that it was over. She bent back a little the better to see Mary's face.

"Will you not punish me ?" said the child. Between the fear and the wonder she was breathless. This was the most wonderful of all.

"No, dear—you will never do it again."

"Nor Nello ?" She put her arms round Mary's arm, with that soft clinging which is irresistible in a child, and leant her head against her, and began to sob as if her heart would break. Then Nello, seeing the worst was over, came out from his shelter, venturing a few steps, then a few more. Forgiveness did not touch him, as punishment would have done. He came slowly, ready to turn and fly at any hostile demonstration. Nello had, as it were, an army at his back, his ships to take refuge in ; but still it was with great caution that he made his advance. This little exhibition of character, however, soon melted in a more agreeable sentiment. As soon as the contingency was over, both the children, restored to a tremulous ease of mind, were seized with a common impulse of curiosity and interest. They forgot their own culpability in watching the obliteration of the damage they had done. Fortunately the discovery had been made in time, and the process of reparation, if not so exciting, was almost as interesting to them as the delicious frenzy of mischief in which they had wrought this harm. They pressed upon Mary as she worked, one at each side. When the last trace had disappeared they gave a cry of joy. How clever Mary was ! She could do

everything. As for Nello, he was unmoved morally by the spectacle ; it had been amusing all through, all but the moment of fear, which fortunately came to nothing. But Lilias never forgot this scene, and still less did Mary forget it, whose heart seemed to be learning a hundred sweet and subtle lessons, and to whom the child, even in her naughtiness, was like an angel, leading her to depths unsounded, nay, unthought of till now.

But when they had gone away, joyous as usual, to their " tea," which was a meal much scorned and wondered at by Martuccia, Mary went to the other table where lay the draught of the more important document upon which Lilias had been employed when she came into the hall. At this she smiled and shuddered, with a curious mixture of feelings. The little girl's mischief had taken a symbolical form. The blank shield which represented her mother was blurred and blood-red, and a stroke like blood ran across her father's name, and that of her father's father, from the little pool of red in the daubed shield. Lilias knew nothing of the lives from which her little life had sprung. It was accident, caprice, a child's fancy for bright colour—yet it made Mary shudder even when she smiled.

Another incident, which she paid less attention to—indeed, did not think of at all—happened this same evening. She went to the door where Martuccia had been seated, her own favourite place, though now in great part given up to the children and their attendant, to look out upon the evening before she left the hall. When she had looked at the sky where the early wintry sunset was just over, leaving deep gorgeous tints of red and yellow upon a blue which was deepened by coming frost, Mary's look came back, carelessly enough, by the lower level of the long brown road. And it was with a momentary start that she found herself almost face to face with an unthought-of spectator, who was standing at the foot of the little slope, gazing intently up to the hall door. Mary was puzzled to see that though the woman's appearance was like that of many of the older women about, she did not know her ; and at the same time she was equally perplexed by a consciousness that the face looking up at her thus eagerly was not that of a stranger. She could not associate it with any name, yet she seemed acquainted with the

features, which were fine, and of an unusual cast. The stranger's look was so intense that it struck Miss Musgrave like an audible petition. "Did you want anything?" she said with natural courtesy, making a step towards her. The woman turned sharp round on her heels with a hasty wave of her hand, and went hurriedly away towards the village without further reply. Who could she be? Mary asked herself lightly, and went in and forgot all about her. The people are independent in their ways, and not grateful for a casual address, in the north.

CHAPTER XII.

VISITORS.

"My Lord Stanton, ma'am," said Eastwood, with a certain expansion in the throat and fulness of voice, like that swell and gurgle which accompanies in a bird the fullest tide of song. Who has not heard that roll in the voice of the man who mouths a title like a succulent morsel? A butler who loves his family, and who has the honour of announcing to them the visit of the greatest potentate about, is a happy man. And this was what Eastwood felt, as he uttered with a nightingale trill and swell of satisfaction this honoured name.

"Lord—*whom*—?" Mary rose to her feet so much startled that she did not know what she said.

"Lord Stanton, ma'am," the butler repeated. "He asked if you would receive him. He said as he would not come in till I asked would you receive him, ma'am. I said you was at home, and not engaged—but he said—"

"Lord Stanton!" The name seemed to hurt her, and a kind of dull fear rose in Mary's mind. She knew, of course, who it was! the young successor of the man who, with intention or not, her brother had brought to his death. She knew well enough about Geoff. It had not been possible to hear the name at any time without interest, and in this way Mary had learned as much

as strangers knew of the young lord. But what could he want here? A subdued panic seized her. She did not know what he could do, or if he could do anything; but that he should come merely as a friend did not seem probable. And how then had he come? She made a tremendous pause before she said, "Let him come in, Eastwood." Eastwood thought Miss Musgrave was very properly impressed by the name of the young lord.

Geoff, for his part, waited outside, anxious as to how he was to be received, and very desirous in his boyish generosity to make a good impression. He had driven to Penninghame, a long way, and his horses, drawn up at the door, made a great show, when the children passed, stealing round the corner like little intruders, but so much attracted by this sight, that they almost forgot their orders never to approach the hall door. Geoff himself was standing at some distance from his phaeton, waiting for his answer; but even Lilius was old enough to know that to address commendatory remarks and friendly overtures to a horse or a dog is more easy and natural than to address a man. She said, "Oh, look, Nello, what lovely horses!" but only ventured to look up shyly into the friendly face of their owner, though she was not without an impression that he, too, was nice, and that he might give his friends a drive perhaps, with the lovely horses, a service which was not in the power of the animals themselves.

Geoff went up to them, holding out his hand. "You are the little Musgraves, I suppose?" he said.

The boy hung back, as usual, hanging by Martuccia's skirts. "Yes," said Lilius, looking at him intently, as she always did; and she added at once, "This is Nello," and did her best to put her small brother in the foreground, though he resisted, holding back and close to his protector.

"Is he shy, or is he frightened? He need not be frightened of me," said Geoff, unconsciously conscious of the facts between them which might have caused the child's timidity had he been old enough to know. "Nello is an odd name for a boy."

"Because you do not know where he came from," said Lilius quickly. "Nello is born in Florence. Here you will call him John. It is not so pretty. And me, I am born in France," she

continued ; "but we are English children. That does not make any difference."

"Don't you think so ?" said simple Geoff. The little woman of twelve who thus fixed him with her great beautiful eyes, made him feel a boy in comparison with her mature childhood. She never relaxed in her watchful look. This was a habit Lilius had got, a habit born of helplessness, and of the sense of responsibility for her brother which was so strong in her mind. That intent, half-suspicious vigilance, as of one fully aware that he might mean harm, and quick to note the approach of danger, disconcerted Geoff, who meant nothing but good. "I know two little girls," he said, trying to be conciliatory, "who would like very much to know you."

"Ah !" said Lilius, melting a little, but shaking her head. "I have to take care of Nello ; but if they would come here, and would not mind Nello," she added, "perhaps I might play with them. I could ask—Mary——"

"Who is—Mary ?"

"Oh ! don't you know ? If you do not know Mary we should not talk to you—we only ought to talk to friends—and besides, you have no right to call her Mary if you do not know her," said Lilius. She turned back to say this after she had gone a few steps away from him, following Nello, who, tired of the conversation, had gone on with his guardian to the Chase.

"That is quite true, and I beg your pardon," said Geoff ; "it must be Miss Musgrave you mean."

Lilius nodded approving. She began to take an interest in this big boy. He was not strictly handsome, but had a bright, attractive countenance, and the child scarcely ever saw any male creature except Eastwood and Mr. Pen. "Have you come to see her ?" she asked wistfully ; "are you going to be a—friend ?"

"Yes," said Geoff with a little emotion, "if she will let me. I am waiting to know. And tell me your name ?" he added, with a slight tremor in his voice, for he was young and easily touched. "I will always be a friend to you."

"I am Lilius," she said shyly, giving him her hand, for which he had held out his. And this was how Eastwood found them when he came bustling out to inform my lord that Miss Musgrave

would see his lordship, if he would be good enough to step this way. Eastwood was much "struck" to see his lordship holding "little Miss's" hand. It raised little Miss in the butler's opinion. "If she had been a bit older, now!" he said to himself. Geoff was half reluctant to leave this little new acquaintance for the audience which he had come here expressly to ask. Mary was not likely to be so easily conciliated as little Lilius. And being a lord did not make him less shy. He waved his hand and took off his hat with a little sigh, as he followed Eastwood into the house; and Lilius, for her part, followed Nello slowly, with various thoughts in her small head. These it must be allowed were chiefly about the little girls who wanted to make friends with her—and of whom her lonely imagination made ecstatic pictures—and of the lovely horses who could spin her away over the broad country, if that big boy would let them. But Lilius did not think very much about the big boy himself.

Geoff went in blushing and tremulous to Miss Musgrave's drawing-room. It was not a place so suitable to Mary as her favourite hall, being dark and somewhat low, not worthy either of her or of Penninghame Castle. She was standing, waiting to receive him, and after the bow with which he greeted her, Geoff did not know what to say to disclose his object. His object itself was vague, and he had no previous knowledge of her, as his cousin Mary had, to warrant him in addressing her. She offered him a chair, and she sat down opposite him; and then there began an embarrassing pause which she would not, and which he did not seem able to, break. At last, faltering and stammering—

"I came, Miss Musgrave," he began, "to say—I came to tell you—I came to ask—Circumstances," cried Geoff, impatient of his own incapacity, "seem to have made our families enemies. I don't know why they should have done so."

"If the story is true, Lord Stanton, it is easy enough to see how they should have done so. My brother was concerned, they say, in your brother's death."

"No one could prove that he did it, Miss Musgrave."

"He did not do it with intention, I am sure," she said. "But so much is true. It was done, and how could we be friends after?"

We should have been angels—you to pardon the loss you had sustained, we to pardon the wrong we had done."

There was a gleam of agitation and pain in her eyes which might well have been taken for anger. The young man was discouraged.

"May I not say anything, then?" he said, wistfully. "My cousin Mary, Lady Stanton, whom you know, told me—but if you are set against us too, what need to say anything? I had hoped indeed, that you——"

"What did you hope about me? I should be glad of any approach. I grieved for your brother as if he had been mine. Oh more, I think, more! if it had been poor John who had died——"

"It would have been better," said the young man. "Yes, yes, Miss Musgrave, that is what I feel; Walter had the best of it. Your brother has been more than killed. But I came to say, that so far as we are concerned, there need not be any more misery. Let him come home, Miss Musgrave, let him come home! We none of us can tell now how Walter died."

Mary was moved beyond the power of words. She got up hastily and took his hand, and pressed it between her own.

"Thank you, I shall always thank you!" she cried, "whether he comes home or not. Oh, my dear boy, who are you that come with mercy on your lips? You are not like the rest of us!"

Mary was thinking of others, more near, whose wrongs were not as the Stantons', but whom nothing could induce to forgive.

"I am my mother's son," said Geoff, his eyes brighter than usual, with a smile lighting up the moisture in them. What Mary said seemed a tribute to his mother, and this made him glad. "She does not know, but she would say so. Let him come home. I heard of the children, and that your brother——"

"Yes," said Miss Musgrave, "from Mary. She told you. She always took an interest in him. Do you know," she added in a low voice of horror, "that there is a verdict against him, a coroner's verdict of murder?"

She shuddered at the word as she said it, and so did he.

"But not a just one. No jury would say it was—that: not now——"

"Heaven knows what a jury would say. It is all half forgotten now; and as for the dates, and all those trifles that tell in a trial, who knows anything about them? Even I—could I swear to the hour my brother went out that morning? I could once, and did, and it is all written down. But I don't seem sure of anything now, not that there ever was a Walter Stanton, or that I had a brother John; and I am one of the interested; the people who were not specially interested, do you think they would have better memories? Ah, no; and he fled; God help him! I don't know why he did it. That was against him; though I don't think any one believes that John Musgrave did *that*, now."

"I am sure they do not, and that is why I came. Let him come home, Miss Musgrave. He would not have been convicted had he been tried. I have been reading it all up, and I have taken advice. He would be cleared. And if there is risk in it, we would all stand by him. I would stand by him," said the young man with a generous flush of resolution, "so much as I am worth. I want you to tell him so. Tell him to come home."

Mary shook her head. How long she had been calm about this terrible domestic tragedy, and how it all rose upon her now! She got up, in her agitation, and walked about the room.

"How could he risk it—how could he risk it—with that sentence against him?" she said; then after a while she came back to her seat, and looked at Geoff piteously with a heartrending look in her eyes. She was past crying, which would have relieved her. "That is not all," she said in a low voice. "Alas, alas! if all was well, and he might come home when he pleased, it would matter less. I know nothing about him, Lord Stanton. I don't know my brother any longer, nor where he is, nor how he is living now."

"But his children have just come to you!"

"Yes, out of the unknown. No one knows anything about him; and suddenly they came out of the darkness, as I tell you. That is where he is: out in the world, in the dark, in the unknown——"

"There are ways of penetrating the unknown," said Geoff, cheerfully. "There are advertisements; everybody sees the

Times nowadays. It goes all over the world. Wherever there is an Englishman he sees it somehow. Let us advertise."

"He would not see it."

"Then a detective—let us send some one——"

"Oh no, no, no,—not that. I could not bear that. We must let him alone till he comes of his own accord. Let well alone," said Mary, in her panic. She scarcely knew what she said.

"Well! do you call it well, Miss Musgrave, that your brother should be away from his home, from everything he loves—his country lost to him, his position, all his friends?"

"He has not been separated from everything he loves; he had wife and children; does a man care for anything else? What was this old house to him, and—us—in comparison? His wife is dead—that was God's doing; and his children have come home—that is his own choice. I say, let well alone, Lord Stanton; when he wishes it he will—come—back; but not to those he loves," Mary said in a low tone.

Geoff could not fathom her meaning, it was beyond him. The accusation under which John Musgrave lay was bad enough. It was cowardly of him (he thought) to fly and leave this stigma, uncontested, upon his own name; but that there should be any further mystery did not seem possible to the young man. Perhaps there was something wrong with the family, some incipient insanity, monomania, eccentricity. He could not understand it. But at least he had shown his goodwill, if no more.

"I must not dictate to you, Miss Musgrave," he said; "you know best," and he rose to go away, but stood hesitating, reluctant to consent to the failure of his generous mission. "If I can be of any use, at any time," he added, blushing and faltering; "not that I can do much: but if you should—change your mind—if you should—think——"

She took his hand once more in both of hers.

"I shall always think that you have the kindest and most generous heart: and are a friend—a true friend—to John, and everybody in trouble."

"I hope so," said the youth, fervently; "but that is nothing; —to you, Miss Musgrave, if I can ever be of any use."

"I will ask you, if it ever can be," she said. "I will not forget."

He kept hold of her hands when she loosed them, and with a confused laugh and change of tone, asked "About the children? I met them just now. Might I bring my little cousins, Lady Stanton's children, to see them? They want to meet."

"Sir Henry would not like it, though she might. Sir Henry is not like you."

"I know; he is *plus royalist que le roi*. But the children would. And they don't deny me anything," said Geoff, with a little laugh.

He scarcely knew why this was—but it was so; nothing was denied to him; he was the *enfant gâté* of Elfdale. Miss Musgrave was not, however, quite so complacent. She gave an assent which was cold and unwilling, and which quenched Geoff's genial enthusiasm. He went back to his phaeton quite subdued and silent. "But I will see that little thing again," he said to himself.

In the mean time, while this conversation had been going on, Lilius had wandered forth alone into the Chase. Martuccia had gone before with Nello, while Lilius talked to the young man; and now the child followed dreamily, as she was in the habit of doing, her eyes abstracted, her whole being rapt in a separate consciousness, which surrounded her like an atmosphere of her own. She knew vaguely that the little brother and his nurse were in front of her; but the watchfulness of Lilius had relaxed, and she was not thinking of Nello. He was safe; here was no one who could interfere with him. She had taken up a branch of a tree which lay in her path and had caught her childish fancy, and with this she went on, using it like a pilgrim's staff, and saying a kind of low chant, without words, to herself, to which the rough staff was made to keep time. What was she thinking of? everything, nothing; thought indeed was not necessary to the fresh soul in that subdued elation and speechless gladness. There was a vague sense in her mind of the brisk air, the sunshine, the blue sky, the floating clouds, all in one; but had the clouds been low upon the trees, and the air all damp instead of all exhilaration, it would have made little difference

to Lilias. Her spring of unconscious blessedness was within herself. Her song was not music nor her movements harmony in any way that could be accounted for by rule ; and indeed the low succession of sounds which came from her lips unawares, and to which her little steps and the stroke of the rough stick kept time, was more inartificial than even the twittering of the birds. A small, passive, embodied happiness went roaming along the rough, woodland path, with soft-glowing abstracted eyes that saw everything, yet nothing ; with a little abstracted soul, all freshness and gladness, that took note of everything, yet nothing ; a little pilgrim among life's mysteries and wonders, herself the greatest wonder of all, throbbing with a soft consciousness, yet knowing nothing. Thus she went pacing on under the bare trees, and murmured her inarticulate chant, and kept time to it, a poet in being, though not in thought. Not far off the lake splashed softly upon the stones of the beach, and that north country air, which is vocal as the winds of the south, sounded a whole mystery of tones and semi-tones, deep through the fir-trees, shrill through the beeches, low and soft over the copse ; and the brook, half-hidden in the overgreenness of the grass, added its tinkle ; all surrounding the little figure which gave the central point of conscious intelligence to the landscape ; but were all quite unnecessary to Lilias marching along in her dream to her own music, a something higher than they, a thing full of other and deeper suggestions, the wonder of the world.

Lilias woke up, however, out of this other world, all in a moment, into the conscious existence of a lively, brave, fancifully-timid child, when she found herself suddenly confronted by a stranger, who did not pass on as strangers usually did, making a mere momentary jar and pause in the visionary atmosphere, but who made a decided pause, and stopped her. A little thrill of fear sprang up in the child's breast, and she would have hurried on, or even run away, but for the pride of honour and courage in her little venturesome spirit which made it impossible to fly. It was an old woman who stood in her path, tall but stooping, dressed in a large grey cloak, the hood of which covered her white thick muslin cap. She was a woman considerably over sixty, with handsome features and brilliant dark eyes, and,

notwithstanding her stooping figure, full of vigour and power. She carried a basket on her arm under her cloak, and had a stick in her hand, and at her neck a red handkerchief just showed, which would have replaced the hood on her cap had it been less cold. Just so the fairy in the fairy-tales appears to the little maiden in the wood, the Cinderella by the kitchen-fire. Liliás was not at all sure that it was not that poetical old woman who looked at her with those shining eyes. She made a brief, instantaneous resolution to draw water for her, or pick up sticks, or do anything she might require.

"Little Miss, you belong to the Castle, don't you now? and where may you come from?" was what the problematical fairy said, with a something wet and gleaming in her eyes such as never obscures the sight of fairies. Liliás was overawed by the tone of eager meaning, though she did not understand it, in the questioning voice, yet might not have answered but for that feeling that it was unsafe, as much experience had proved, to be less than obsequiously civil to old women with wands in their hands who could make (if you were so naughty as to give a rude answer) toads and frogs drop from your mouth.

"Yes," she said, with a little tremble in her clear, childish voice. "We come a very, very long way—over the mountains, and then over the sea."

"Do you know the name of the place you came from, little Miss?"

"Oh yes, I know it very well, we were so often there. It was Bagni di Lucca. It was a very, very long way. Nello—"

But the child paused. Why introduce Nello, who was not visible, to the knowledge of this uncertain person? who, if she was a fairy, might be a wicked one, or, if she was a woman, might be unkind, for anything Liliás knew. She stopped short nervously, and it was evident that the old woman had not taken any notice of the name.

"Little Miss, your mamma would be sorry to send you away?"

"It was papa," said the little girl, with wondering eyes. "Poor mamma;—I was quite little when—it was when Nello was a little, little small baby. Now we have nobody but papa."

The old woman staggered and almost fell, but supported herself

by her stick for a moment, while Liliás uttered a scream of terror ; then sat down with a groan upon a fallen tree. "It's nothing new, nothing new," she said to herself ; "I felt it long ago," and covered her face with her hands, with once more a heavy groan. Little Liliás did not know what to do. She had screamed when the old woman staggered, not knowing what was going to happen ; but what was she to do now, alone with this strange companion, seated there on the fallen trunk and rocking herself to and fro, with her face hidden in her hands. It did not occur to the child to associate this sudden trouble with the information she had herself given. What could this stranger have to do with her ? And poor mamma had receded far into the background of Liliás's memory, not even now an occasion of tears. She did not, however, need to go into this reasoning, but simply supposed that the poor old fairy was ill, or that something had happened to her, and never at all connected effect and cause. She stood for a little time irresolute, then, overcoming her own fears, went up to the sufferer and stroked her compassionately on the shoulder. "Are you ill, old woman ?" she said.

"Oh, call me Granny—call me Granny, my pretty dear !"

Liliás was more puzzled than ever ; but she made up her mind that she would do whatever was asked of her by this disguised personage, who might turn into—anything, in a moment. "Yes, Granny," she said, trembling, and still stroking the old woman's shoulder. "I hope you are not ill."

The answer she made to this was suddenly to clasp her arms round Liliás, who could scarcely suppress a cry of horror. What a strange—what a very strange old woman ! Fortunately Liliás, brought up in a country where servants are friends, had no feeling of repulsion from the embrace. She was a little frightened, and did not understand it—that was all. The old woman's breast heaved with great sobs ; there could be no doubt that she was very deeply, strongly moved. She was "very sorry about something," according to Liliás' simple explanation. She clasped the child close, and kissed her with a tearful face, which left traces of its weeping upon the fresh cheeks. The little girl wiped them off, wondering. How could she tell why this was ? Perhaps it was only to try her if she was the kind of little girl who was uncivil,

or not; but she did not indeed try to account for it. It was not very pleasant, but she put up with it, partly in fear, partly in sympathy, partly because, as we have said, she had no horror of the too near approach of a poor old woman, as an English-bred child might have had. Poor old creature, how sorry she was about something! though Liliás could not imagine what it was.

"God bless you, honeysweet," said the old woman. "You've got her dear face, my jewel. It isn't that I didn't know it years and years ago. I was told it in my sleep; I read it in the clouds and on the water. Oh, if you think I wasn't warned! But you've got her bonnie face. You'll be a beauty, a darling beauty, like the rest of us. And look you here, little Miss, my jewel. If you see me when the gentry's with you you'll take no notice; but if you see me by myself you'll give me a kiss and call me Granny. That's fixed between us, honey, and you won't forget? Call me Granny again, to give me a little comfort, my pretty dear."

"Yes, Granny," said the child, trembling. The old woman kissed her again, drying her tears.

"God bless you, and God bless you!" she said. "You can't be none the worse of your old Granny's blessing. And mind, if you're with the gentlefolks you'll take no notice. Oh, my honeysweet, my darling child!"

Liliás looked after her with wondering, disturbed eyes. What a strange old woman she was! How strange that she should behave so! and yet Liliás did not attempt to inquire why. Grown-up people in her experience did a great many strange things. It was of no use trying to fathom what they meant, and this strange old person was only a little more strange than the rest, and startling to the calm little being who had grown in the midst of family troubles and mysteries without divining any of them. Strangely enough, the old woman felt equally independent of any necessity for explanation. It seemed so clear in her mind that everybody must know the past and understand her claims, whatever they were. She had no more idea of the tranquillity of innocent ignorance in Liliás's mind than the little girl had of the mysteries of her experience. Liliás watched her going away through the high columns of the trees with great wonder yet respect, and it was not till she had disappeared that the little girl

went on after Nello. Nello would have been frightened by that curious apparition. He would have cried perhaps, and struggled, and would not have said Granny. Perhaps he would have angered her. What a good thing that Nello had not been here !

PART IV.

CHAPTER XIII.

FAMILY CARES.

LILIAS did not say much about the adventure in the wood, nothing at all indeed to Mary or any one in authority; nor did it dwell in her mind as a thing of much importance. The kind of things that strike a child's mind as wonderful are not always those which would most impress an older person. There were many things at Penninghame very curious and strange to the little girl. The big chimneys of the old house, for instance, the sun-dial in the old garden, and on a lower level the way in which Cook's cap kept on, which seemed to Lilius miraculous, no means of securing it being visible. She pondered much on these things, trying to arrive at feasible theories in respect to them, but there was no theory required about the other very natural incident. That an old woman should meet her in the woods, and kiss her, and ask to be called granny, and cry over her,—there was nothing wonderful in that; and indeed if, as she already suspected, it was no old woman at all, but a fairy, such as those in the story-books, who would probably appear again and set her tasks to do, much more difficult than calling her granny, and end by transforming herself into a beautiful lady—this would still remain quite comprehensible, not by any means unparalleled in the experience of one who had already mastered a great deal of literature treating of such subjects. She was interested but not surprised, for was it not always to a child or children by them-

selves in a wood that fairies did speak? She told Nello about the meeting, who was not surprised any more than she was; for though he was not very fond of reading himself, he had shared all his sister's, having had true histories of fairies read to him almost ever since he could recollect anything. He made some cynical remarks prompted by his manhood, but it was like much manly cynicism, only from the lips, no deeper. "I thought fairies were all dead," he said.

"Oh, Nello; when you know they are spirits and never die! they are hundreds and hundreds of years older than we are, but they never die; and it is always children that see them. I thought she would tell us to do something——"

"I would not do something," said Nello; "I would say, 'Old woman, do it yourself.'"

"And do you know what would happen then?" said Lilius, severely; "whenever you opened your mouth, a toad or a frog would drop out of it."

"I should not mind; how funny it would be! how the people would be surprised."

"They would be frightened--fancy! every word you said; till all round there would be things creeping and creeping and crawling all over you; slimy cold things that would make people shiver and shriek. Oh!" said Lilius recoiling and putting up her hands, as if to put him away; "the frogs! squatting and jumping all over the floor."

At this lively realization of his problematical punishment, Nello himself grew pale, and nervously looked about him. "I would kill her!" he cried, furiously; "what right would she have to do that to me?"

"Because you did not obey her, Nello."

"And why should I obey her?" cried the boy; "she is not papa, or Martuccia—or Mary."

"But we must always do what the fairies tell us," said Lilius, "not perhaps because they have a right—for certainly it is different with papa—but because they would hurt us if we didn't; and then if you are good and pick up the sticks, or draw the water from the well, then she gives you such beautiful presents. Oh! I will do whatever she tells *me*."

"What kind of presents, Lily? I want a little horse to ride —there are a great many things that I want. Do fairies give you what you want, or only what they like?"

This was a puzzling question; and on the spur of the moment Liliás did not feel able to answer such a difficulty. "If you do it for the presents, not because they ask you, they will not give you anything," she said; "that would be all wrong if you did it for the presents."

"But you said——"

"Oh, Nello; you are too little, you don't understand," cried the elder sister, like many another perplexed authority; when you are older you will know what I mean. I can tell you things, but I can't make you understand?"

"What is it he cannot understand?" said Mary, coming suddenly upon their confidential talk. The two children came apart hastily, and Liliás, who had two red spots of excitement on her cheeks, looked up startled, with lips apart. Nello laughed with a sense of mischief. He was fond of his sister, but to get her into trouble had a certain flavour of fun in it, not disagreeable to him.

"It is about the fairies," he cried, volubly. "She says you should do what they tell you. She says they give you beautiful presents. She says, she——"

"Oh, about the fairies!" said Mary, calmly, with a smile, going on without any more notice. Liliás was very angry with her brother, but what was the use? And she was frightened lest she should be made to look ridiculous, a danger which is always present to the sensitive mind of a child. "I will never, never talk to you again," she said to him under her breath; but Nello knew she would talk to him again as soon as her mind wanted disburdening, and was not afraid.

And of how many active thoughts, and wonderful musings, and lively continued motion of two small minds and bodies, the old hall was witness in those quiet days! Mary coming and going, and the solid figure of Martuccia in the sunshine, these two older and more important persons were as shadows in comparison with that ceaseless flow of existence. The amount of living in the whole house beside, was not half equal to that

which went on in the motherly calm of the old hall, which held these two small things like specks in its tranquil embrace, where so much had come to pass. There was always something going on there. Such lively counterfeiting of the older life, such deeply-laid plans, dispersed in a moment by sudden changes of purpose, such profound gravity upset by the merest chance interruption, such perpetual busyness without thought of rest. Their days went on thus without hindrance or interruption, nothing being required of them except to be amused and healthy, and competent to occupy and please themselves. Had they been dull children, or subject to the precocious *ennui* which is sometimes to be seen even in a nursery, no doubt measures would have been taken to bring about a better state of affairs; but as they were always busy, always gay, they were left completely to their own devices, protected, sheltered, and ignored, enjoying the freedom of a much earlier age, a freedom from all teaching and interference, such as seldom overpasses the first five years of human life. Mary had her whole *métier* to learn in respect to the children, and there were many agitating circumstances which pre-occupied her mind and kept her from realizing the more simple necessities of the matter. It had cost her so much to establish them there, and the tacit victory over fate, unnatural prejudice, and all the bondage of family troubles, had been so great, that the trembling satisfaction of having gained it blunted her perceptions of further necessity. It was from a humble quarter that enlightenment first came to her. Her teacher was Miss Brown, her maid, who had early melted to the children, and who by this time was their devoted vassal, and especially the admiring slave of Nello, whom, with determined English propriety, she called Master John. Miss Brown's affection was not unalloyed by other sentiments. Her love for the children indeed was intensified by strenuous disapproval of their other guardians — Martuccia with her foreign fashions, and Miss Musgrave, who was ignorant as a baby herself, and knew nothing about "children's ways." Between these two incapable persons her life became a burden to Miss Brown. "I can't get my night's rest for thinking of it," she said to Cook, who like herself had the interest of many years' service in the "the family." "I

would up and speak," said Cook. " Speak ! " cried Miss Brown, " I'm always speaking ; but what can a body do, when folks won't understand ? " It is the lament of the superior intelligence over all the world. However, Miss Brown finally made up her mind to speak, and did so, pointing out that Master John was eight, though he looked no more than six, and that " schooling " was indispensable. The suggestion when once made could not be disputed, and it raised a great perturbation in Mary's breast. She sent away the maid with some haste and impatience, but she could not send away the thought.

And the more Mary thought upon this matter, the more serious it grew ; she brooded over it till her head ached ; and she was glad beyond measure to see Mr. Pennithorne coming slowly along the road. She could see him almost from the moment his spare figure turned the corner from the village ; the outline and movement of him was so familiar to her, as he grew upon the quiet distance drawing nearer and nearer. It was seldom that she anticipated his approach with so much satisfaction. Not that Mr. Pennithorne, good man, was likely to invent an outlet out of a difficulty, but he was the only person to whom she could talk with absolute freedom upon this subject, and to put it forth in audible words, and set it thus in order to her own ear and mind, was always an advantage. How like Mr. Pen it was to come on so quietly step after step, while she was waiting impatient for him ! not a step quicker than usual, no swing of more rapid motion in the droop of his long coat. Why should he quicken his steps ? She laughed to herself at her own childish impatience. Ought he not to have divined that she wanted him urgently after all these years ? Mary had gone into the hall, the children being absent on their daily walk. They were so much in her thoughts that she was glad to get them out of her sight for the moment and thus relieve the air which rustled and whispered with them. She went out to meet the slowly approaching counsellor. It was summer by this time, and all was green and fair, if still somewhat cold in its greenness to a southern eye. The sunshine was blazing over the lake, just approaching noon, and the sky was keenly blue, so clear that the pleasure of it was almost a pain, where the green shoulder of the

hill stood against it in high relief. It was seldom that Mary was at leisure so early, and very seldom that in the morning when both were busy she should have a visit from Mr. Pen. As she made a few steps down the slope that led from the hall door, to meet him, the sunshine caught her full, streaming from behind the corner of the house. It caught in her hair, and shone in it, showing its unimpaired gloss and brightness. Mr. Pennithorne was dazzled by it as he came up, and asked himself if she was superior to time as to most things else, and, after all those years, was young as well as lovely still ?

"I am very glad to see you," she said, holding out her hand. "I just wanted you ; it is some good fairy that has sent you so early to-day."

His face brightened up with an answering gleam ; or was it only the sun that had got hold of him too, and woke reflections in his middle-aged eyes ? "I am very happy to have come when you wanted me," he said, his eyelids growing moist with pleasure. He went in to the hall, where all was comparative dusk after that brilliant shining of the noon, and sat down on the stool which was Martuccia's usual place. "Whatever you want, Miss Mary, here I am," her faithful servant said.

Then she unfolded to him her difficulty : "Their education ! " what was she to do ? what could be done ? Mr. Pen sat by her very sympathetically and heard everything. He was not very clever about advising, seeing that it was generally from her that he took advice, instead of giving it. But he listened, and did not see his way out of it, which of itself was a comfort to Mary. If he had been clever, and had struck out a new idea at once, it is doubtful whether she would have liked it half so well. She went into the whole question, and eased her mind at least. What was she to do ? Mr. Pen shook his head. He was quite ready to take Nello, and teach him all he remembered, after a life spent in rural forgetfulness, of Latin and Greek ; but Lilias ! and Lilias was the most urgent as being the eldest. There was no school within reach, and a governess, as Mr. Pen suggested with a little trembling—a governess ! where could Mary put her, —what could she do with her ? It seemed hopeless to think of that.

"I don't know what you will think of what I am going to say—but there is Randolph, Miss Mary ; he is a family man himself. I suppose—of course—he knows about the children ?"

"Randolph !" said Mary, faltering ; "Mr. Pen, you know what Randolph is as well as I do."

"People change," said Mr. Pen, evasively. "It is not for me to say anything ; but perhaps—he ought to know."

"He has never taken any interest in the house ; he has never cared to be—one of us," said Mary. "Perhaps because he was brought up away from us. You know all about it. When he came back—when he was with you and poor John—— You know him as well as I do," she concluded abruptly. "I don't see what help we could have from him."

"He is a family man himself," said the vicar. "When children come they bring new feelings ; they open the heart. He was not like you—or poor John ; but he was like a great many people in this world ; he would not be unkind. You write to him sometimes ?"

"Once or twice a year. He writes to ask how my father is—I often wonder why. He has only been here once since—since it all happened. He would not have it known that he was one of the family which was so much talked about—that he was the brother of——" Mary stopped with a flash of indignation in her eyes. "He has separated himself altogether from us, as you know ; but he asks from time to time how my father is, though I scarcely know why."

"And you have told him, I suppose, about the children ?"

"No, Mr. Pen ; he turned his back upon poor John from the beginning. Why should I tell him ? what has he to do with it ? We have left our subject altogether talking of Randolph, who is quite apart from it. Let us go back to our sheep—our lambs in this case. What is to be done with them ?"

"I will do what I can for them, as I did for their father," said the vicar. "I was thinking that little Johnny must very soon—and Mary might as well—They can come to me for an hour or two every day ; that would be something. But I think Randolph should be told. I think Randolph ought to know. He might be thinking, he might be calculating——"

"What, Mr. Pen?" Mary confronted him with head erect and flashing eyes. "Why should he think or calculate about us? He has separated himself from the family. John's children are nothing to him."

It was not often that Mr. Pen was worldly wise; but he had an inspiration this time. He shook his head slowly. "It is just that; John's children might make all the difference to him," he said.

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CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

MR. PENNITHORNE went home thoughtful, and Miss Musgrave remained behind, if not exactly turned in a new direction, yet confused and excited in her mental being by the introduction of a new element. Randolph Musgrave, though her brother, was less known to Mary than he was to the tutor who had travelled and lived with him in the interval during which he had made his nearest approach to friendship with his own family. He had been brought up by an uncle on the mother's side who did not love the Musgraves, and had succeeded to the family living belonging to that race, and lived now, as he had been brought up, in an atmosphere quite different from that which belonged to his nominal home in the north. Except now and then, in a holiday visit, Randolph had scarcely spent any portion of his life at Penninghame, except the short period just before, and for a little time after, his university career, when he shared with his brother John the special instructions of Mr. Pennithorne. The two young men had worked together then, or made believe to work, and they had travelled together; but being of very different dispositions, and brought up in ways curiously unlike, they had not been made into cordial friends by this period of semi-artificial union. Randolph had been trained to entertain but a small opinion of everything at Penninghame, and when Penninghame became public property, and John and all his

affairs and peculiarities were discussed in the newspapers, the younger son did something very like the Scriptural injunction —shaking the dust from off his feet as he departed. He went away after some painful scenes with his father. It was not the old Squire's fault that his eldest son had become in the eyes of the world a criminal ; but Randolph was as bitter at the ignominy brought upon his name as if it had been a family contrivance to annoy and distress him, and had gone away vowing that never again would he have anything to do with his paternal home. There had been a long gap in their relations after that, but at his marriage there had been a kind of reconciliation, enough to give a decorous aspect to his relations with his "people." He had brought his bride to his father's house, and since then he had written, as Mary said, now and then, once or twice in the year, to inquire after his father's health. This was not much, but it saved appearances, and prevented the open scandal of a family quarrel. But Mary, who replied punctiliously to these questions, did not see the need of making a further intimation to him of anything that affected the family. What had he to do with John's children ? She would no more have thought of informing him of any private event in her own history, or of looking to him for sympathy, than she would have stopped a beggar on the road to communicate her good or evil fortune. But the very name of Randolph suggested new complications. She was glad to escape from the whole matter and listen to the account of the lessons when Lilias and Nello came back from one of their earliest experiences of the instruction given by Mr. Pennithorne. The children came in breathless with the story they had to tell. "Then he made me read out of all the books," said Lilias, her dark eyes shining ; "but Nello, because he was so little, one book was enough for him."

"But it was not a girl's book," said Nello ; "it was only for Johnnie and me."

"And I looked in it," said his sister ; "it is all mixed with Italian—such funny Italian : instead of *padre* it was put *payter*—Mr. Pen called it so. But it would not do for Nello, when we go back, to say his Italian like that. Even Martuccia would laugh, and Martuccia is not educated."

"It was Latin," said Nello ; "Mr. Pen said so. He said girls didn't want Latin. Girls learn to dance and sing ; but I—and Johnnie——"

"Will Mr. Pen teach me to dance—and sing, Mary ?" said Liliias, with a grave face.

"And me, I wrote a copy," said Nello, indifferent to the interruption ; "look !" and he held up fingers covered with ink. "You cannot read it yet, but you will soon be able to read it, Mr. Pen says. And then I will write you a letter, Mary."

"It would be better to write letters to some one far off," said Liliias, half scornful of his want of information. "You can *talk* to Mary, Nello. It is to far-off people that one makes letters."

"We have nobody that is far off," said Nello, shaking his head with the sudden consciousness of a want not hitherto realized. "Then I need not write copies any more."

"Your father is far off, Nello," said Mary ; "your poor papa, who never hears any news of you. Some time I hope you will be able to write to him, and ask him to come home."

"Oh," cried Liliias, "you need not be sorry about that, Mary. He will come home. Some day, in a moment when you are thinking of nothing, there will be a step on the stair, and Martuccia will give a shriek ; and it will be as if the sun came shining out, and it will be papa ! He is always like that—but you never know when he will come."

Mary's eyes filled in spite of herself. What long, long years it was that she had thought but little of John ! and yet there suddenly seemed to come before her a vision of his arrival from school or from college, all smiles and brightness, making the old roof ring with his shout of pleasure. Was it possible that this would happen over again—that he would come in a moment, as his little daughter said ? But Liliias did not know all the difficulties, nor the one great obstacle that stood in John's way, and which perhaps he might never get over. She forgot herself in these thoughts, and did not perceive that Liliias was gazing wistfully at her, endeavouring with all her childish might to penetrate her mind and know the occasion of these tears. Mary was recalled to herself by feeling the child's arm steal round her, and the soft touch of a little hand and handkerchief upon her

wet eyes. "You are crying," said Liliás. "Mary, is it for papa? —why should you cry for papa?"

"My darling, we don't know where he is, nor anything about him—"

"That does not matter," said Liliás, winking rapidly to throw off the sympathetic tears which had gathered in her own eyes; "he is always like that. We never knew where he was; but just when he could, just when it was possible, he came home. We never could tell when it would be—it might be any day. Some time when we are forgetting and not expecting him. Ah——!" cried the child, with a ring of wonder in the sudden exclamation. The hall-door was open as usual, and on the road was a distant figure just visible which drew from Liliás this sudden cry. She ran to the door, clutching her brother—"Come, Nello, Nello!" and rushed forth. Mary sat still, thinking her heart had stopped in her breast—or was it not rather suffocating her by the wildness of its beating? She sat immovable, watching the little pair at the door. Could it be that John had come home? John! he who would be the most welcome yet the most impossible of visitors; he who had a right to everything, yet dared not be seen in the old house. She sat and trembled, not daring to look out, already planning what she could do, what was to be done.

But the children stopped short at the door. Liliás, with the wind in her skirts and her ribbons, half-flying, stopped; and Nello stopped, who went by her impulse, not by his own. They paused: they stood for a moment gazing; then they turned back sadly.

"Oh no, no!" said Liliás. "No, Mary! no. It is a little, something like—a very little; it is the walking, and the shape of him. But no, no, it is not papa!"

"Papa!" said Nello, "was that why you looked? I knew better. Papa is all that much more tall. Why are you crying, Lily? There is nothing that makes cry."

"I am disappointed," said the little girl, who had seated herself suddenly on the floor and wept. It was a sudden sharp shower, but it was soon over; she sprang up drying her eyes. "But it will be for to-morrow!" she cried.

Mary sat behind and looked on. She did not think again of the chance resemblance Lilias had seen, but only of the children themselves, with whom her heart was tuning itself more and more in sympathy. She had become a mother late and suddenly, without any gradual growth of feeling—leaping into it, as it were ; and every response her mind made to the children was a new wonder to her. She looked at them, or rather at Lilias, who was always the leader in her rapid changes of sentiment, with a half-amused adoration. The crying and the smiles went to her heart as nothing else had ever done ; and even Nello's calm, the steadier going of the slower, less developed intelligence, which was so often carried along in the rush without any conscious intention, and which was so ready to take the part of the wise and say, “I knew it,” moved Mary with that mixture of pleased spectatorship and profound personal feeling which makes the enthusiasm of parents. Nello's slowness might have seemed want of feeling in another child, and Lilias's impetuosity a giddy haste and heedlessness ; but all impartiality was driven from her mind by the sense that the children were her own. And she sat in a pleased abstraction yet lively readiness, following the little current of this swiftly-flowing, softly-babbling childhood which was so fair and pleasant to her eyes. The two set up an argument between themselves as she sat looking on. It was about some minute point in the day's work which was so novel and unaccustomed ; but trivial as it was Mary listened with a soft glow of light in her eyes. The finest drama in the world could not have taken her out of herself like the two little actors, playing their sincerest and most real copy of life before her. They were so much in earnest, and to her it was such exquisite play and delicate delightful fooling ! And until the light in the open doorway was suddenly darkened by some one appearing, a figure which made her heart jump, she thought no more of the passer-by on the road who had roused the children. Her heart jumped, and then she followed her heart by rising suddenly to her feet, while the children stopped in their argument, runshed together for mutual support, and stood shyly with their heads together, the arrested talk still hovering about their lips. Seen thus against the light the visitor was undecipherable to Mary.

She saw him, nothing but a black shadow, towards which she went quietly and said—

“I beg your pardon, this is a private door,” with a polite defence of her own sanctuary.

“I came to look for—my sister,” said the voice, which was one which woke agitating memories in her. “I am a—stranger. I came—— Ah! it is Mary after all.”

“Randolph!” she cried, with a gasp in her throat.

A thrill of terror, almost superstitious, came over her. What did it all mean? Good Mr. Pennithorne in his innocence had spoken to her of John, and that very day John’s children had arrived; he had spoken of Randolph, and Randolph was here. Was it fate, or some mysterious influence unknown? She was so startled that she forgot to go through the ordinary formulas of seeming welcome, and said nothing but his name.

“Yes; I hope you are well,” he said, holding out his hand; “and that my father is well. I thought I would come and see how you were all getting on.”

“It is a long time since you have been here,” she said. What could she say? She was not glad to see him, as a sister ought to be. And then there was a pause.

The children stood staring open-mouthed while these chill greetings were said. (“I wonder who it is?” said Lilia, under her breath. “It is the one who is a little, a very little, like papa.” “It is a—gentleman,” said Nello. “Oh you silly, silly little boy! not to know that at the very first; but Mary is not very glad to see him,” said the little girl.)

Mary did not even ask her visitor to come in; he stood still at the door, looking round him with watchful, unfriendly eyes. This was not a place for any one to come who was not tender of Mary, and of whomsoever she might shelter there. She did not want him in that special place.

“Shall we go round to the house?” she said; “my father ought to know that you are here, and he never comes into the hall.”

“I am very well where I am,” Randolph said. “I know it was always a favourite place with you. Do not change your sitting-room for me. You have it in very nice order, Mary. I

see you share the popular passion for art furnishing ; and children too ! This is something more novel still. Who are the children, may I ask ? They are visitors from the neighbourhood I suppose ? ”

“ No,” she said, faltering still more, “ they are not visitors—they—belong to us——” Mary could not tell how it was that her lips trembled, and she hesitated to pronounce the name. She made an effort at last and got it out with difficulty. “ They are—John’s children.”

“ John’s children ! here is a wonderful piece of news,” said Randolph ; but she saw by his countenance that it was no news. Howsoever he had heard it, Mary perceived in a moment not only that he knew, but that this was his real errand here. He stood with the appropriate gesture of one struck dumb in amazement ; but he was not really surprised, only watchful and eager. This made his sister more nervous than ever.

“ Children,” she said, “ come here—this is your uncle Randolph ; come and speak to him.” Mary was so much perplexed that she could not see what was best to do—whether to be anxiously conciliatory and convince Randolph in spite of himself, without seeming to notice his opposition, or to defy him ; the former, however, was always the safest way. He did not make any advance, but stood with a half-smile on his face, while the children drew near with suspicious looks.

“ It is the—gentleman who is—a little—not very much, just a little, like papa,” said Lilius, going forward, but slowly, and with that look of standing on the defensive which children unconsciously adopt to those they do not trust.

Nello hung on to her skirts, and did as she did, regarding the stranger with cloudy eyes. Randolph put out his hand coldly to be shaken ; his smile broadened into a half-laugh of amusement and contempt.

“ So they are said to be his children, are they ? ”

“ They *are* his children,” said Mary.

Randolph shrugged his shoulders and laughed. “ They look like foreigners anyhow,” he said. “ My father, I suppose, is delighted. It must be a new experience both for him and you.”

“ Go away, my darlings, go to Martuccia ; you see I have

some business with—this gentleman.” She could not again repeat the title she had given him. When the curious little spectators had gone, she turned to Randolph, who stood watching their exit, with an anxiety she did not attempt to conceal. “For Heaven’s sake do not talk to my father about them ! I ask it as a favour. He consents tacitly that they should be here, but he takes no notice of them. Do not call his attention to them. It is the only thing I ask of you.”

He looked at her fixedly still, with that set smile on his face with which he had looked at the children.

“I am scarcely the person to be called upon to make things smooth with my father,” he said. “Come, come ; my father is old, and can be made to believe anything, let us allow. But what do you mean by it, Mary, what do *you* mean ? You were never any friend to me.”

“Friend to *you* ! I am your sister, Randolph, though you don’t seem to remember it much. And what have you to do with it ?” asked Mary, with a certain amount of exasperation in her voice ; for of all offensive things in the world there is none so offensive as this pretence of finding you out in a transparent deception. Mary grew red and hot in spite of herself.

“I have a great deal to do with it. I have not only my own interests to take care of, but my boy’s. And why you should prefer to us, about whom there can be no doubt, these little impostors, these supposed children of John——”

“Randolph,” said Mary, with tears in her eyes, “there is no supposing about them. Oh don’t go against us and against truth and justice ! They brought me a letter from their father. There was no room to doubt, no possibility. John himself is most unfortunate——”

“Unfortunate ! that is not the word I should use.”

“But why remember it against *them*, poor little things, who have done no harm? Oh, Randolph, I have never been otherwise than your friend when I had the chance. Be mine now ! There are a hundred things about which I want to consult you. You have a family of your own ; you have been trained to it ; you know how to take care of children. I wanted to ask your advice, to have your help——”

"Do you think me a fool then," he cried, "as silly as yourself? that you try to get *me* to acknowledge this precious deception, and give you my support against myself? Why should I back you up in a wicked contrivance against my own interests?"

"What is it you mean? Who has been guilty of wicked contrivances?" cried Mary, aghast. She gazed at him with such genuine surprise that he was arrested in his angry vituperation, and changed his tone to one of mockery, which affected her more.

"Well," he said, "let us allow that it is your first attempt, Mary, and that is why you do it so clumsily. The mistakes good people make when they first attempt to do badly are touching. Villany, like everything else, requires experience. But it is too funny to expect *me* to be the one to stand up for you, to persuade my father to believe you."

"Oh," she said, clasping her hands, "do you think this is what I ask? It is you who mistake, Randolph. It has never occurred to my father, or any one else, not to believe. He never doubted any more than I was capable of doubting. I will show you John's letter."

Randolph put up his hand, waving off the suggested proof.

"It is quite unnecessary. I am not to be taken in by such simple means. You forget I have a stake in it—which clears the judgment. And I warn you, Mary, that I am here to look after my personal interests, not to foist any nondescript brat into the family. I give you notice—it is not to help your schemes, it is for my own interests I am here."

"What do interests mean?" she said wondering. "Your own interests!—what does *that* mean? I know *I* have none."

"No—it cannot make much difference to you whatever happens; therefore you are free to plot at your leisure. I understand that fully; but, my dear, *I* am here to look after myself—and my boy. You forget I have an heir of my own."

Mary looked at him with a dulness of intelligence quite unusual to her. There are things in the most limited minds which genius itself could not divine. The honourable and generous, and the selfish and grasping, do not know what each

other mean. They are as if they spoke a different language. And her brother was to Mary as if he veiled his meaning in an unknown tongue. She gazed at him with a haze of dulness in her eyes. What was it he intended to let her know ? Disbelief of her, a suggestion that she lied ! and something more—she could not make out what, as the rule of his own conduct ! He looked at her, on the other hand, with an air of penetration, a clever consciousness of seeing through and through her and her designs, which excited Mary to exasperation. How could they ever understand each other with all this between ?

"I am going to see my father," said Randolph ; "that of course is the object of my visit ; I suppose he will not refuse to keep me for a day or two. And in the mean time why should we quarrel ? I only warn you that I come with my eyes open, and am not to be made a dupe of. Good-bye for the present—we shall meet no doubt at dinner the best of friends."

Mary stood still where he left her, and watched him as he went slowly down the slope and round the corner of the house. He was shorter than John and stouter, with that amplitude of outline which a wealthy rural living and a small parish are apt to confer. A comfortable man, fond of good living, fond of his ease ; yet taking the trouble to come here, for what ?—to baffle some supposed wicked contrivances and plots against himself. Mary remembered that Randolph had taken the great family misfortune as a special wrong to him. How dared the evil fates to interfere with his comfort or rumour to assail his name ? He had said frankly that it could be nothing to the others in comparison. And was it once more the idea that he himself was touched, which had roused him out of his comfortable rectory to come here and assert himself ? But how did the arrival of John's children affect that ? Mary, in her long calm, had not entered into those speculations about the future which most people more or less think necessary when the head of the house is old. She had not asked herself what would happen when her father died, except vaguely in respect to herself, knowing that she would then in all likelihood leave the old Castle. John was the heir. Somehow or other, she did not know how, the inheritance would be taken up for him. This had been the conclusion in her mind

without reason given or required. And Randolph had not come into the sphere of her imagination at all as having anything to do with it. What should he have to do with it when there was John? And even now Mary did not know and could not understand the reason of his objection to John's children. She stood and looked after him with a dull beating of pain in her heart. And as he turned round the corner of the old house towards the door, he looked back and waved his hand. The gesture and look, she could scarcely tell why, gave her a sensation of sickening dismay and pain. She turned and went in, shutting the door in the sudden pang this gave her. And to shut the great door of the hall was the strangest thing, except in the very heart of winter. While the sun was shining and the air genial, such a thing had never happened before. It seemed in itself a portent of harm.

CHAPTER XV.

RANDOLPH.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE was a squire-parson, a class which possesses the features of two species without fully embodying either—which may be finer than either, the two halves of the joint character tempering each other—or may be a travesty of both, exaggerating their mutual defects. He was of the latter rather than of the former development. His living was small in one sense and large in another, the income being large, but the people few and very much given up to dissent, a fact which soured his character without moving him to exertion. He was not fond of exertion in any case, and it was all but hopeless in this. But not less was he daily and hourly irritated by the little Bethels and Salems, the lively Methodists, the pragmatical Baptists, who led his people away. They made him angry, for he was easily moved to anger, and they increased that tendency to listen to gossip and be moved by small matters which is one

of the temptations of a rural life. He had become accustomed to make much of petty wrongs, calling them insults and crimes, and perhaps to be more disposed to petty vengeance than a man who is placed in the position of an example to others ought to be; and whereas he had always been disposed to consider himself a sacred person, above the ordinary slights of fortune, this tendency had grown and strengthened so, that every petty pin-prick was like a poisoned arrow to him. By natural laws of reverberation he heard more evil of himself, had more mishaps in the way of gossip, of receiving letters not intended for him, and otherwise surprising the sentiments of his neighbours, than almost any one else ever had—which had made him suspicious of his neighbours in the highest degree, and ready to believe every small offence a premeditated insult. This perhaps made him all the more ready to believe that his sister had conceived a villainous plan against him and his. He would not have done such a thing himself; but was not his life full of such attempts made upon him by others? everybody almost whom he encountered having one time or other conspired against his hopes or happiness. But he had always found out the plots in time. It was true that this villany might be John's, of whom he would have believed anything; and Mary herself might be the dupe: but most likely it was Mary, who did not like him nor his wife, and who would no doubt be capable of anything to banish him finally from Penninghame, and set up there some creature of her own. This was the idea which had come into his mind, when he heard accidentally of the arrival which had made so much commotion in the north country. He had talked it over with his wife till they both saw gunpowder plots and conspiracies incalculable in it. "You had better go and see into it yourself," Mrs. Randolph said. "I will," was the Rector's energetic reply. "And believe nobody, believe nothing but what you see with your own eyes." "Never! I will put faith in nobody," Randolph had said. And it was in this frame of mind that he had come here. He meant to believe nobody save when they warned him of plots against himself: to trust nothing save that all the world was in a league to work him harm. But for this determined pre-conclusion, he might perhaps have been less certain of his

sister's enmity to himself, and of the baseness of the deception she was practising ; but he had no doubt whatever on this matter now. And he meant to expose her remorselessly. Why should he mince matters ? His father was an old man and might die at any moment, and this villany ought to be exposed at once.

With these thoughts in his mind he went round to the great door. How different was the grey north-country house from anything he was used to ! The thought of his snug parsonage embosomed in greenery, roses climbing to the chimney-stacks, clustering about all the windows, soft velvet lawns and strict inclosures keeping all sacred—made him shiver at sight of the irregular building, the masses of ivy fostering damp, the open approach, a common road free to everybody. If it ever was his, or rather when it was his—for these supposititious children would soon be done away with, and John, a man under the ban of the law, how could he ever appear to claim his inheritance?—*when* it was his, he would soon make a difference. He would bring forward the boundaries of the Chase so as to inclose the Castle. He would make the road into a stately avenue as it once was and ought to be. What did it matter who objected ? He would do it; let the village burst with rage. The very idea of exasperating the village and making it own his power, made the idea all the more delightful. He would soon change all this ; let it but get into his hands. In the midst of these thoughts, however, Randolph met a somewhat ludicrous rebuff from Eastwood, who opened the door suddenly and softly, as was his fashion, as if he hoped to find the visitor out in something improper. “Who shall I say, sir ?” said Eastwood, deferentially. This gave Randolph a sense of the most ludicrous discomfiture ; for to be asked what name is to be announced when you knock at the door of your father's house is a curious sensation. It was nobody's fault unless it might have been Randolph's own, but the feeling was disagreeable. He stood for a moment dumb, staring at the questioner—then striding inside the door, pushed Eastwood out of his way. When he was within, however, somewhat conciliated by the alarmed aspect of the butler, who did not know whether to resist or what to do, he changed his mind.

"I don't want to startle my father," he said ; "say Mr. Randolph Musgrave has arrived."

"I beg your pardon humbly, sir," cried Eastwood.

"No, no, it was not your fault," Randolph replied. It was not the servant's fault ; but it was *their* fault who had made his home a place of disgrace, and no longer a fit home for him.

The Squire was seated among his books, feeling the drowsy influence of the afternoon. He had no Monograph to support his soul, and no better occupation than to rummage dully through the records of antiquity, cheered up and enlivened if he found something to reply to in *Notes and Queries*, but otherwise living a heavy kind of half-animate life. When the critiques and the letters about that Monograph had ended, what a blank there was ! and no other work was at hand to make up, or to tempt him to further exertions. The corner of land that he desired to attain had been bought, and had given him pleasure ; but after a while his eyes were satisfied with the contemplation, and his mind almost satisfied with the calculation, of so many additional acres added to the property. The sweetness of it lay in the thought that the property was growing, that there was sufficient elasticity in the family income to make the acquisition of even a little bit of land possible. The Squire thought this was the fruit of his own self-denial, and it gave him that glow of conscious virtue which was once supposed to be the appropriate and unfailing reward of good actions, till conscious virtue went out of fashion. This was sweet ; and it was sweet to go and look at the new fields which restored the old boundary of the Penninghame estate in that direction ; but such gratifications cease to be sustaining to life after a time. And Mr. Musgrave was dull sitting among his books ; the sounds were in his ears which he was always hearing now—the far-off ring of voices that made him sensible of those inmates in his house whom he never noticed, who were to him as if they did not exist. When the mind is not very closely occupied, sounds thus heard in the house come strangely across the quiescent spirit of the solitary. Voices beloved are as music, are as sunshine, conveying a sense of happiness and soft exhilaration. Hearing them far off, though beyond the reach of hearing, so to speak, does not the very

distant sound, the tone of love in them, make work sweet and the air warm, softening everything round the recluse? But these were not voices beloved. The old man listened to them—or rather, not permitting himself to listen, *heard* them acutely through the mist of a separation which he did not choose to overcome. They were like something from another world, voices in the air, inarticulate, mysterious, known yet unknown. He turned the leaves idly when these strange suggestions came to him in his solitude; he had nothing to do with them, and yet so much. This was how he was sitting, dully wistful, in that stillness of age which when it is not glad must be sad, and hearing almost, as if he were already a ghost out of his grave, the strange yet familiar stir in the unseen stairs and passages, the movements of the kindly house—

“Mr. Randolph Musgrave!” The Squire was very much startled by the name. He rose hastily, and stood leaning upon his writing-table to see who it was that followed Eastwood into the room after a minute’s interval. It seemed scarcely possible to him that it could be his son. “Randolph!” he said. The children’s voices had made him think, in spite of himself, of the time—was it centuries ago?—when there were two small things running about those old passages continually, and a beautiful young mother smiling upon them—and him. This had softened his heart, though by means which he would not have acknowledged. He looked out eagerly with a sensation of pleasure and relief for his son. He would (perhaps) take Randolph’s advice, perhaps get some enlightenment from him. But the shock set his nerves off, and made him tremulous, though it was a shock of pleasure; and it hurt his pride so to be seen trembling, that he held himself up strained and rigid against his table. “Randolph! you are a stranger indeed,” he said, and his countenance lighted up with a cloudy and tremulous smile.

(“Strange that he was never seen here before in my time,” said Eastwood as he withdrew. “I’ve seen a many queer things in families, but never nothing more queer than this—two sons as never have been seen in the house, and children as the Squire won’t give in he owns them. I thought he’d have walked right straight over little master Saturday last as if no one was there.”

But I don't like the looks of *'im*. When he's master here I march, and that I can tell you—pretty fast, Missis Cook."

"Mr. Randolph? He'll never be master here, thank God for it," said Cook with pious fervour, "or more than you will go.")

"Yes," said Randolph, walking in, "I have been a stranger, but how can we help that! It is life that separates us. We must all run our own course. I hope you are well, sir. You look well—for your time of life."

It is not a pleasant thing to be told that you look well for your time of life—unless indeed you are ninety, and the time of life is itself a matter of pride. The Squire knew he was old, and that soon he must resign his place to others; but he did not care for such a distinct intimation that others thought so too.

"I am very well," he said, curtly. "You are so completely a stranger, Randolph, that I cannot make the usual remarks on your personal appearance. You deny me the opportunity of judging if you look ill or well."

"Ah," said Randolph, "that is just what I said. We must all run our own course. My duties are at the other end of England, and I cannot be always running back and forward; but I hope to stay a few days now if you will have me. Relations should see each other now and then. I have just had a glimpse of Mary in the old hall as usual. She did not know me at first, nor, I daresay, if I had not seen her there, should I have known her"—

"Mary is little changed," said the Squire.

"So you think, sir, seeing her every day; but there is a great change from what she was ten years ago. She was still a young woman then, and handsome. I am afraid even family partiality cannot call her anything but an old maid now."

Mr. Musgrave did not make any reply. He was not a particularly affectionate father, but Mary was part of himself, and it did not please him to hear her spoken of so.

"And, by the bye," said Randolph, "how did such a thing happen I wonder? for she *was* handsome;—handsome and well-born, and with a little money. It is very odd she never has married. Was there anything to account for it? or is it mere ill-luck?"

“ Ill-luck to whom ? ” said the Squire. “ Do you think perhaps your sister never had the chance, as people say ? You may dismiss that idea from your mind. She has had enough of chances. I don’t know any reason ; but there must have been one, I suppose. Either that nobody came whom she cared for, or—I really cannot form any other idea,” he concluded, sharply. It was certain that he would not have Mary discussed.

“ I meant no harm,” said Randolph. “ She has got the old hall very nicely done up. It is not a place I would myself care to keep up, if the Castle were in my hands ; but she has made it very nice. I found her there with—among her favourite studies,” he added, after a momentary pause. It was too early to begin direct upon the chapter of the children, he felt. The Squire did not show any sign of special understanding. He nodded his head in assent.

“ She was always fond of the hall,” he said. “ I used to think she suited it. And now that she is—past her youth, as you say——”

“ Well into middle age I say, sir, like other people ; which is a more serious affair for a woman than for a man ; but I suppose all hopes are over now. She is not likely to marry at her time of life.” This was the second time he had mentioned the time of life. And the Squire did not like it ; he answered curtly—

“ No, I don’t think it likely that Mary will marry. But yourself, Randolph, how are things going with you ? You have not come so far merely to calculate your sister’s chances. Your wife is well, I hope ; and your boy ? ”

“ Quite well. You are right in thinking, sir, that I did not come without an object. We are all getting on in life. I thought it only proper that there should be some understanding among us as to family affairs—something decided in the case of any emergency. We are all mortal——”

“ And I the most mortal of all, you will say, at my ‘ time of life,’ Randolph ” said the Squire, with a smile, which was far from genial. “ I daresay you are quite right, perfectly right. I am an old man, and nobody can tell what an hour may bring forth.”

“ That is true at every age,” said Randolph, with professional

seriousness. "The idea ought to be familiar to the youngest among us. In the midst of life we are in death. I recommend everybody over whom I have the least influence to settle their affairs, so that they may not leave a nest of domestic contentions behind them. It is only less important than needful spiritual preparation, which of course should be our first care."

"Just so," said Mr. Musgrave. "I presume you don't mean to bring me to book on that point?"

"Certainly not, sir—unless there is any special point upon which I could be of use; but you are as well able to judge as I am, and have access to all the authorities," said Randolph with dignity. "Besides, there is your own clergyman at hand, who is no doubt quite equal to the duties of his position. It is old Pennithorne, is it not?" he added, with a momentary lapse into a more familiar tone. "But there is no question of that. In such matters a man of your experience, sir, ought to be able to instruct the best of us."

"The bench of bishops even," said the Squire, "sometimes I think I could—at my time of life. But that is not the question, as you say."

"No indeed—not to say that my best advice in every way is at your service, sir; but I thought very likely it would be an ease to your mind to see me, to give me any instructions or directions—in short, to feel that your nearest representative understood your wishes, whatever might happen."

Now Randolph was evidently his father's representative, John being out of the question; and that John was absolutely out of the question, not only from external circumstances, but from the strong prejudice and prepossession against him in his father's mind, was certain. Yet the Squire resented this assumption as much as if John had been his dearly-beloved son and apparent heir.

"Thanks," he said, "I feel your care for my comfort—but after all, you are not my direct representative."

"Sir!" cried Randolph reddening, "need I remind you of the disabilities, the privation of all natural rights—"

"You need not remind me of anything," said Mr. Musgrave, getting up hurriedly. "I don't care to discuss that question—

or anything else of the kind. Suppose we go and join Mary, who must be in the drawing-room, I suppose? It is she, after all, who is really my representative, knowing everything about my affairs."

"She—is a woman," said Randolph, with a tone of contempt.

"That is undeniable—but women are not considered exactly as they used to be in such matters."

"I hope, sir," said the clergyman, with dignity, "that neither my sister nor you add your influence to the foolish movement about women's rights."

"Do you mean that Mary does not want a vote?" said the Squire. "No, I don't suppose it has occurred to her. We add our influence to very few public movements, Randolph, bad or good. The Musgraves are not what they once were in the county; the leading part we once took is taken by others who are richer than we are. Progress is not the thing for old families, for progress means money."

"There are other reasons why the Musgraves do not take their proper place. I have hopes, sir," said Randolph, "that under more favourable circumstances—if we, perhaps, were to draw more together—"

"What do you mean, sir?" said the Squire; "it was you who separated yourself from us, not us from you. You were too good, being a clergyman, as you said, to encounter the odium of our position. That's enough, Randolph. It is not an agreeable subject. Let us dismiss it as it has been dismissed these fifteen years; and come—to Mary's part of the house."

"Then, am I to understand," said Randolph, sharply, rising, yet holding back, "that your mind is changing as old age gains upon you, that you are going to accept the disgrace of the family? and that it is with your sanction that Mary is receiving—adopting—?"

He stopped, overawed in spite of himself, by the old man's look, who stood with his face fixed looking towards him, restraining with all his force the tremor of his nerves. The Squire had been subject all his life to sudden fits of passion, and had got the habit of subduing, by ignoring them, as all his family well knew. He made no reply, but the restrained fire in his eyes impressed

even the dull imagination of his son, who was pertinacious rather than daring, and had no force in him to stand against passion. Mr. Musgrave turned round quickly, and took up his book, which lay on a table near.

"Mary sent you a copy of the Monograph?" he said; "but I don't remember that you gave me your opinion of it. It has had a very flattering reception generally. I could not have expected so much interest in the public mind on a question of such exclusive family interest. But so it has been. I have kept all the notices, and the letters I have received on the subject. You shall see them by and by; and I think you will agree with me, that a more flattering reception could scarcely have been. All sorts of people have written to me. It appears," said the Squire, with modest pride, "that I have really been able to throw some light upon a difficulty. After dinner, Randolph, if you are interested, you shall see my collection."

"My time is short," said Randolph, "and with so many more serious matters to discuss——".

"I know few things more serious than the history of the family honours," said the Squire, "especially as you have a boy to inherit the old blazon; but we'll go into all that this evening, as your stay is to be short. Better come and see Mary before dinner. She will want to know all about your home-concerns, and your wife. The house is unchanged, you will perceive," the Squire continued, talking cheerfully as he led the way; and the sound of his voice, somewhat high-pitched and shrill with age, travelled far through the old passages. "I hope no sacrilegious hands will ever change the house. My heirs may add to it if they please, but it is a monument of antiquity, which ought never to be touched—except to mend it delicately as Mary mends her old lace. This way, Randolph; I believe you have forgotten the way."

They were standing in an angle of the fine oak staircase, where the Squire waited till his son came up to him. At this moment a rush of small footsteps, and a whispering voice—"Run, Nello, Nello! he is coming," was audible above. Randolph looked up quickly, with a look of intelligence, into the old man's face. But the Squire did not move a muscle. His countenance

was blank as that of a deaf man. If he had heard, he allowed no sign of hearing to be visible. "Come along," he said, "it seems to me that my wind is better than yours even at my time of life," with a half-sarcastic smile. Was he hard of hearing? a hypothesis rather agreeable to think of; or what was the meaning of it? Were these obnoxious children the pets of the house? but why should they run because he was coming. The hostile visitor was perplexed, and could not make it out. He followed into the drawing-room without a word, while the small footsteps were still audible. Mary was seated at a low table on which there was work, but she was not working. She rose to receive them with a certain formality; for except after dinner, when the Squire would sometimes come for a cup of tea, or when there were visitors in the house, she was generally alone in the low quaint drawing-room, which transported even the unimaginative Randolph back to childhood. The panelled walls, the spindle-legged furniture, the inlaid cabinets and tables, were all exactly as he remembered them. This touched him a little, though he had all the robustness against impression which fortifies a slow intelligence. "It seems like yesterday that I was here," he said.

This, in her turn, touched Mary, whose excitement made her subject to the lightest flutter of emotion. She smiled at him with greater kindness than she had yet felt. "Yes," she said. "I feel so sometimes, too, when I look round; but it tells less upon us who are here always. And so much has happened since then."

"Ah, I suppose so: though you seem to vegetate pretty much in the old ways. Those children though, for instance," said Randolph, with a laugh, "scurrying off in such haste as we came within hearing, that is not like the old ways. Are you ashamed of them, or afraid to have them here? I should not wonder, for my part."

The tears sprang to Mary's eyes. She did not say anything in the sudden shock, but looked at Randolph piteously with a silent reproach. It was the first time since the day of their arrival that any public mention had been made of the children in her father's presence. And there was a pause which seemed to her full of fate.

" You must not look at me so," said her brother. " I gave you fair warning. My father is not to be given up to your plots without a remonstrance at least. I believe it is a conspiracy, sir, from beginning to end. Do you intend our old family, with all the honours you are so proud of, to drop into disgrace? With the shadow of crime on it," cried Randolph, warming into excitement; then, with a dull perception of something still more telling, his father's weak point, " and the bar sinister of vice?" he said.

CHAPTER XVI.

DUCKS AND DRAKES.

THE Squire made use of that discretion which is the better part of valour. When Randolph for the second time insisted upon coming to an understanding on family affairs, which meant deciding what was to be done on the Squire's death, Mr. Musgrave, not knowing how else to foil his son, got up and came away. " You can settle these matters with Mary," he said, quietly enough. It would not have been dignified to treat the suggestion in any other way. But he went out with a slight acceleration of his pulses, caused half by anger and half by the natural human thrill of feeling with which a man has his own death brought home to him. The Squire knew that there was nothing unnatural in this anticipation of his own end. He was aware that it required to be done, and the emergency prepared for; but yet it was not agreeable to him. He thought they might have awaited the event, although in another point of view it would have been imprudent to await the event. He felt that there was something undesirable, unlovely, in the idea of your children consulting over you for their own comfort " afterwards." But then his children were no longer children whose doings touched his affections much—they were middle-aged people, as old as he was—and in fact it *was* important that they should come to an arrangement and settle everything. Only he could

not—and this being so, would not—do it ; and he said to himself that the cause of his refusal was no reluctance on his own part to consider the inevitable certainty of his own death, but only the intolerableness of the inquiry in other respects. He walked out in a little strain and excitement of feeling, though outwardly his calm was intense. He steadied himself, mind and body, by an effort, putting a smile upon his lip, and walking with a deliberate slow movement. He would have scorned himself had he showed any excitement ; but strolled out with a leisurely slow step and a smile. They would talk the matter out, the two whom he had left ; even though Mary's heart would be more with him than with her brother, still she would be bound to follow Randolph's lead. They would talk of his health, of how he was looking feeble, his age beginning to tell upon him, and how it would be very expedient to know what the conditions of his will were, and whether he had made any provision for the peculiar circumstances, or arrangement for the holding of the estate. "I ought to be the first person considered," he thought he heard Randolph saying. Randolph had always thought himself the first person to be considered. At this penetration of his own the Squire smiled again, and walked away very steadily, very slowly, humming a bar of an old-fashioned air.

He went thus through the broken woodland towards the east, and strolled into the Chase like a man taking a walk for pleasure. The birds sang overhead, little rabbits popped out from the great tree-trunks, and a squirrel ran up one of them and across a long branch, where it sat peering at him. All was familiar, certain, well known ; he had seen the same sights and heard the same sounds for the last seventy years ; and the sunshine shone with the same calm assurance of shining as at other times, and all this rustling, breathing life went on as it had always gone on. There was scarcely a leaf, scarcely a moss-covered stone that did not hide or shelter something living. The air was full of life ; sounds of all kinds, twitter and hum and rustle, his own step among other movements, his own shadow moving across the sunshine. And he felt well enough, not running over with health and vigour as he had sometimes felt long ago, not disposed to vault over walls and gates in that

unlicensed exuberance which belongs to youth only, but well enough—quite well, in short; steady afoot, his breathing easy, his head clear, everything about him comfortable. Notwithstanding which, his children were discussing, as in reference to a quite near and probable event, what was to be done when he should die! The Squire smiled at the thought, but it was a smile which got fixed and painful on his lip, and was not spontaneous or agreeable. The amusement to be got from such an idea is not of a genial kind. He was over seventy, and he knew, who better? that threescore and ten has been set down as the limit of mortal life. No doubt he must die—every man must die. It was a thing before him not to be eluded; the darkness, indeed, was very near, according to all ordinary law; but the Squire did not feel it, was not in his soul convinced of it. He believed it, of course; all other men of his age die, and in their case the precautions of the family are prudent and natural; in his own case it is true he did not feel the necessity; but yet no doubt it must be so. He kept smiling to himself; so living as he was, and everything round, it was an odd sort of discord to think of dying. He felt a kind of blank before him, a sense of being shut in. So one feels when one walks along a bit of road surrounded with walls, a *cul de sac* from which there is no outlet. A sense of imprisonment is in it, of discouragement, too little air to breathe, too little space to move in—certainly a disagreeable, stifling, choking sensation. Involuntarily a sigh came from his breast; and yet he smiled persistently, feeling in himself a kind of defiance to all the world, a determination to be amused at it all, notwithstanding the sentence they were passing against him.

While the Squire continued his walk, amid the twitter of the birds and the warble and the crackle and rustle and hum in the woods, and all the sounds of living, now and then another sound struck in—a sound not necessarily near, for in that still summer air sounds travel easily—an echo of voices, now one soft cry or laugh, now a momentary babble. It struck the old man as if an independent soul had been put into the scene. He knew very well what it meant—very well—no one better. By very dint of his opposition to them he recognized the sound of the

children wherever they were. They were there now, the little things whose presence had moved Randolph to this assault upon his father. They were altogether antagonistic to Randolph, or rather he to them ; this gave them a curious perverse interest in their grandfather's eyes. They offered him an outlet from his *cul de sac* ; the pressure seemed suddenly removed which had bowed him down ; in a moment he felt relieved, delivered from that sense of confinement. A new idea was like the opening of a door to the old man ; he was no longer compelled to contemplate the certainty before him, but was let softly down into the pleasant region of uncertainty—the world of happy chances. The very character of the smile upon his face changed. It became more natural, more easy, although he did not know the children, nor had any intention of noticing them. But they were there, and Randolph might scheme as he liked ; here was one who must bring his schemes to confusion. A vague lightening came into the Squire's thoughts. He was reprieved, if not from the inevitable conclusion, at least from the necessity of contemplating it ; and he continued his walk with a lighter heart. By and by, after a somewhat long 'round, and making sundry observations to himself about the state of the timber which would bear cutting, and about the birds which, without any keeper to care for them, were multiplying at their own will, and might give some sport in September, Mr. Musgrave found himself by the lake again with that fascination towards the water which is so universal. The lake gleamed through the branches, prolonging the blue of the sky, and calling him with soft plashing upon the beach, the oldest of his friends, accompaniment of so many thoughts, and of all the vicissitudes of his life. He went towards it now in the commotion of feeling which was subsiding into calm, a calm which had something of fatigue in it ; for reluctant as he was to enter into the question of age and the nearly approaching conclusion, the fact of age made him easily tired with everything, and with nothing more than excitement. He was fatigued with the strain he had been put to, and had fallen into a languid state which was not unpleasant ; the condition in which we are specially disposed to be easily amused if any passive amusement comes in our way.

So it happened that as he walked along the margin of the lake, with the water softly foaming over the pebbles at his feet, Mr. Musgrave's ear was caught by a series of sharp little repetitions of sound, like a succession of small reports—one, two, three. He listened in the mild, easily-roused, and not very active curiosity of such a moment, and recognized with a smile the sound of pebbles skipping across the water; presently he saw the little missiles gleaming along from ripple to ripple, flung by a skilful but not very strong hand. The Squire did not even ask himself who it was, but went on quietly, doubting nothing. Suddenly turning round a corner upon the edge of a small bay, he saw a little figure between him and the shining water, making ducks and drakes with varying success.

The Squire's step was inaudible on the turf, and he paused in sympathy with the play. He himself had made ducks and drakes in the Penninghame water as long as he could recollect. He had taught his little boys to do it; he could not tell how it was that this suddenly came to his mind just now—though how it should do so with Randolph, a middle-aged, calculating parson, talking about family arrangements—Pah! but even this recollection did not affect him now as it did before. Never mind Randolph. This little fellow chose the stones with judgment, and really, for such a small creature, launched them well. The Squire felt half disposed to step forward and try his skill too. When one shot failed he was half-sorry, half-inclined to chuckle as over an antagonist; and when there came a great success, a succession of six or seven reports one after another as the flat pebble skimmed over fold after fold of the water, he could not help saying, “Bravo!” in generous applause; generous, for somehow or other he felt as if he were playing on the other side. This sensation aroused him; he had not been so self-forgetting for many a day. “Bravo!” he cried, with something like glee in his voice.

The little boy turned round hastily. What a strange meeting! Oddly enough it had never occurred to the Squire to think who it was. Strangers were rife enough in these regions, and people would now and then come to Penninghame with their families—who would stray into the Chase, taking it for public property.

But for the ducks and drakes which interested him, he would probably have collared the little fellow, and demanded to know what right he had to be here. He was therefore quite unprepared for the encounter, and looked with the strangest emotions of wonder and half-terror into the face which was so familiar to him, but so strange, the face of his grandson and heir. When once he had seen the child no further doubt was possible. He stared at him as if he had been a little ghost. He had not presence of mind to turn on his heel and go away at once, which would have been the only way of keeping up his former tactics; he was speechless and overpowered; and there was nobody by to spy upon him, no grown-up spectators—not even the other child to observe what he did, or listen to what he said. In this case the Squire did not feel the need to be vigilant, which in other circumstances would have given him self-command. Thus the shock and surprise, and the perfect freedom of his position, unwatched and unseen, alike broke down all his defences. After the first start he stood still and gazed at the child, who still, more frankly and with much less emotion, gazed at him.

"Who are you, sir?" the grandfather said, with a tone that was meant to be very peremptory. The jar in it was incomprehensible to Nello: but yet it gave him greater courage.

"I am Ne—that is to say," the little fellow answered, with a sudden flush and change of countenance, "my name, it is John."

"John what? Speak up, sir. Do you know you are a little trespasser, and have no business to be here?"

"Oh yes, I have a business to be here," said Nello. "I don't know what it is to be a trespasser. I live at the Castle, me. I can come when I please, and nobody has any business to send me away."

"Do you know who I am?" asked the Squire, bending his brows. Nello looked at him curiously, half amused, though he was half frightened. He had never been so near, or looked his grandfather in the face before.

"I know; but I may not tell," said Nello. He shook his head, and though he was not very quick-witted, some latent sense of fun brought a mischievous look to his face. "We know very well, but we are never to tell," he added, shaking his

head once more, looking up with watchful eyes, as children have a way of doing, to take his cue from the expression of the elder face ; and there was something very strange in that gleam of fun in Nello's eyes. "We know, but we are never, never to tell.

"Who told you so ? "

"It was—Martuccia," said the boy, with precocious discretion. His look grew more and more inquisitive and investigating. Now that he had the opportunity he determined to examine the old man well and to make out the kind of person he was.

Mr. Musgrave did not answer. He on his side was investigating too, with less keenness and more feeling than the child showed. He would have been unmoved by the beauty of Lilius, though it was much greater than that of Nello. The little girl would have irritated him ; but with the boy he felt himself safe, he could not tell how ; he was more a child, less a stranger. Mr. Musgrave himself could not have explained it, but so it was. A desire to get nearer to his descendant came into the old man's mind ; old recollections crept upon him, and stole away all his strength. "You know who I am ; do you know who you are, little fellow ? " he asked, with a strange break in his voice.

"I told you ; you are—the old gentleman at home," said Nello. "I know all about it. And me ? I am John. There is no wonder about that. It is just — me. We were not always here. We are two children who have come a long way. But now I know English quite well, and I have lessons every day."

"Who gives you lessons, my little boy ? " The Squire drew a step nearer. He had himself had a little brother sixty years ago, who was like Nello. So it seemed to him now. He would not think he had likewise had a son thirty years ago, whom Nello was like. He crept a little nearer the child, shuffling his foot along the turf, concealing the approach from himself. Had he been asked why he changed his position, he would have said it was a little damp, boggy, not quite sure footing just there.

"Mr. Pen gives us lessons," said Nello. "I have a book all to myself. It is Latin, it is more easy than English. But it takes a great deal of time ; it does not leave so much for play."

"How long have you been at your lessons, my little man?"

The Squire's eyes began to soften, a smile came into them. His heart was melting. He gave a furtive glance round, and there was nobody near to make him afraid, not even the little girl.

"Oh, a long, long time," said Nello. "One whole hour, it was as much as that, or perhaps six hours. I did not think anything could be so long."

"One whole hour!" the Squire said in a voice of awe; and his eyes melted altogether into smiling, and his voice into a mellow softness which it had not known for years. Ah! this was the kind of son for an old man to have, not such as Randolph. Randolph was a hard, disagreeable equal, superior in so much as he had, or thought he had, many more years before him; but the child was delightful. He did the Squire good. "Or perhaps six hours! And when did this long spell of study happen? Is it long ago?"

"There was no spell," said Nello. "And it was to-day. I readed in my book, and so did Lily; but as she is a girl it was different from mine. Girls are not clever, Martuccia says. She can't make the stones skim. That was a good one when you said 'Bravo!' Where did you find out to say Bravo? They don't talk like that here."

"It was a very good one," said the Squire; "suppose we were to try again."

"Oh! can *you* do it?" said Nello, with round eyes of wonder. "Can you do it as well as me?"

"When I was a child," said the Squire, quite overcome, "I had a little brother just like you. We used to come out here, to this very place, and play ducks and drakes. He would make them go half across the water. You should have seen them skimming. As far out as that boat. Do you see that boat——"

"When he was no bigger than me? And what did you do? were *you* little too? did you play against him? did he beat you? I wish I had a brother," said Nello. "But you can't have quite forgotten, though you are an old gentleman. Try now! There are capital stones here. I wish I could send one out as far as that boat. Come, come! Won't you come and try?"

The Squire gave another searching look round. He had a sort of shame-faced smile on his face. He was a little shy of himself in this new development. But there was no one near, not so much as a squirrel or a rabbit, which could watch and tell. The birds were singing high up in the tree-tops, quite absorbed in their own business ; nothing was taking any notice. And the child had come close to him, quite confiding and fearless, with eager little eyes, waiting for his decision. He was the very image of that little brother so long lost. The Squire seemed to lose himself for a moment in a vague haze of personal uncertainty whether all this harsh, hard life had not been a delusion, and whether he himself still was not a child.

"Come and try," cried Nello, more and more emboldened, and catching at his coat. When the old man felt the touch, it was all he could do to suppress a cry. It was strange to him beyond measure, a touch not like any other—his own flesh and blood.

"You must begin then," he said, a strange falter in his voice, half-laughing, half-crying. That is one sign of age, that it is so much nearer to the springs of emotion than anything else, except youth. Indeed, are not these two the fitting partners, not that middle state, that insolent strength which stands between ? The Squire permitted himself to be dragged to the margin of his own water, which lay all smiling in soft ripples before him as it had done when he was a child. Nello was as grave as a judge in the importance of the occasion, breathless with excitement and interest. He sought out his little store of stones with all the solemnity of a connoisseur, his little brows puckered, his red lips drawn in ; but the Squire was shy and tremulous, half-laughing, half-crying, ashamed of his own weakness, and more near being what you might call happy (a word so long out of use for him !) than he had been, he could not remember when.

Nello was vexed with his first throw. "When one wants to do very good, one never can," he said, discomfited as his shot failed. "Now you try, now you try ; it is your turn." How the Squire laughed, tremulous, the broken red in his old cheeks flushing with pleasure and shame ! He failed too, which encouraged Nello, who for his part made a splendid shot the

second time. "Two, three, four, *five, six, seven!*" cried the child in delight. "Don't be afraid, you will do better next time Me too, I could not make a shot at all at first. Now come, now come, it is your turn again."

What a thing it is to have a real long summer afternoon! It was afternoon when the Squire's calm was broken by his son Randolph; and it was afternoon still, dropping into evening, but with a sun still bright and not yet low in the sky when Mr. Musgrave warmed to his work, and, encouraged by Nello, made such ducks and drakes as astonished himself. He got quite excited as they skimmed and danced across the water. "Two, *three, four, five, six, seven, eight!*" Nello cried, with a shriek of delight. How clever the old gentleman was—how much nicer than *girls*. He had not enjoyed his play so much for—never before, Nello thought. "Come back to-morrow—will you come back to-morrow?" he said at every interval. He had got a playmate now after his own heart—better than Mr. Pen's Johnnie, who was small and timid—better than any one he had ever seen here.

The two players did not in the growing excitement of their game think any more of the chance of spectators; and did not see a second little figure which came running across the grass through the maze of the trees, and stopped wondering in the middle of the brushwood, holding back the branches with her hands to gaze at the strange scene. Lilius was never quite clear of the idea that this wood was fairy-land: so she was not surprised at anything she saw. Yet at this, for the first moment, she was tempted to be surprised. The old gentleman! playing at ducks and drakes with Nello! He who pretended never to see them, who looked over their heads whenever they appeared, for whom they always had to run out of the way, who never took any notice! Lilius stood for two or three whole minutes, holding the branches open, peeping through with a rapt gaze of wonder; yet not surprised. She applied her little faculties at once, on the instant, to solve the mystery; and what so natural as that the old gentleman had been "only pretending" all the time? Half the pleasure which Lilius herself had in her life from "pretending." Pretending to be Queen Elizabeth,

pretending to be a fairy and change Nello into a lion or a mouse, both of which things Nello "pretended" to be with equal success; pretending to be Mr. Pen preaching a sermon, pretending to be Mary, pretending even now and then to be "the old gentleman" himself, sitting up in a chair with a big book, just like him. She stood and peeped through the branches, and made up her mind to this in a way that took away all her surprise. No doubt he was "only pretending" when he would not let it be seen that he saw them. Motives are not necessary to investigators of twelve; there was nothing strange in it; for was not pretending the chief occupation, the chief recreation of life? She stood and made this out to her own satisfaction, and then with self-denial and with a sigh went back to Martuccia. It was very tempting to see the pebbles skimming across the water, and so easy it seemed! "Me too, me too," Lilius could scarcely help calling out. But then it came into her head that perhaps it was herself whom the old gentleman disliked. Perhaps he would not go on playing if she claimed a share, perhaps he would begin "pretending" not to see her. So Lilius sighed, and with self-denial gave up this new pleasure. It was very nice for Nello to have some one to play with—some one *new*. He was always the lucky one; but then he was the youngest, such a little fellow. She went back and told Martuccia he was playing; he was coming soon, he was not in any mischief—which was what the careful elder sister and mild indulgent nurse most feared.

When Lilius let the branches go, however, with self-denial which was impulsive though so true, the sweep with which they came together again made more sound than could have been made by a rabbit or squirrel, and startled the Squire, who was quite hot and excited in his new sport. He came to himself with a start, and with the idea of having been seen, felt a pang of shame and half-anger. He looked round him and could see nobody; but the branches still vibrated as if some one had been there; and his very forehead, weather-beaten as it was, flushed red with the idea of having been seen, perhaps by Randolph himself. This gave him a kind of offence and resentment and self-assertion which mended matters. Why should he care for Randolph? What had Randolph to do with it? Was he to put

himself under tutelage, and conform to the tastes of a fellow like that, a parson, an interloper ? But all the same this possibility stopped the Squire. "There, my little man," he said with some confusion, dropping his stone, "there ! I think it is time to stop now."

"Oh !—was it some one come for you ?" said Nello, following the direction of the old gentleman's eyes. "Stay a little longer, just a little longer. Can't you do just what you please—not like me——"

"Can you not do what you please, my little boy ?" The Squire was a little tremulous with the unusual exertion. Perhaps it was time to stop. He stooped down to lave his hand in the water where it came shallow among the rocks, and that act took away his breath still more, and made him glad to pause a moment before he went away.

"It is a shame," said Nello, "there is Lily, and there is Martuccia, and there is Mary,—they think I am too little to take care of myself; but I am not too little—I can do a great many things that they can't do. But come to-morrow, won't you *try* to come to-morrow ?" said the child, coming close up to his grandfather, and taking hold of the skirt of his coat. "Oh please, please *try* to come ! I never have any one to play with, and it has been such fun. Say you will come ! Don't you think you could come if you were to *try* ?"

The Squire burst out into a broken laugh. It would have been more easy to cry, but that does not do for a man. He put his soft old tremulous hand upon the boy's head. "Little Johnny," he said, "little Johnny !—that was my little brother's name, long, long ago."

"Did he play with you ? I wish I had a little brother. I have nothing but girls," said Nello. "But say you will come to-morrow—do say you will *try* !"

The Squire gave another look round him. Nobody was there, not a mouse or a bird. He took the child's head between his trembling hands, and stooped down, and gave him a hasty kiss upon his soft round forehead—"God bless you, little man !" he said, and then turned round defiant, and faced the world—the world of tremulous branches and fluttering leaves, for there was

nothing else to spy upon the involuntary blessing and caress. Then he plunged through the very passage in the brushwood where the branches had shaken so strangely—feeling that if it was Randolph he could defy him. What right had Randolph to control his actions? If he chose to acknowledge this child who belonged to him, who was the image of the little Johnny of sixty years ago, what was that to any one? What had Randolph,—*Randolph*, of all men in the world,—to do with it? He would tell him so to his face if he were there.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BAMPFYLDÉS.

THE same day on which these incidents occurred the Stanton family were in full conclave at Elfdale. It was the birthday of Laura, and there were various merrymakings on hand, an afternoon party, designed to include all her "young friends," besides a more select company in the evening. As Laura was the one whom the family intended to be Lady Stanton, her affairs, with the willing consent, and indeed by the active energy of her sister, were generally pushed into the foreground. And Geoff and his mother were the chief of the guests specially invited, the only visitors who were staying in the house.

To say that the family intended Laura to be Lady Stanton is perhaps too wild a statement, though this settlement of conflicting claims had been tacitly decided upon when they were children. It was chiefly Lydia who actively intended it now, moved and backed up by some of the absent brothers, who thought it "hard luck" that the young unnecessary Geoff should have interfered between their father and the title, and vowed by Jove that the only fit thing to do in the circumstances was to marry him to one of the girls. Lydia, however, was the most active mind in the establishment at Elfdale, and carried things her own way, so that though Sir Henry disliked fuss,

and disliked Geoff's mother, who had done him so much wrong, yet the party in the evening had been specially selected to suit her, and Maria, Lady Stanton, was established in the house.

"It can't last long, papa," Lydia said; "but we can't have Geoff without her."

"What do you want with Geoff?" growled Sir Henry.

"Papa! in the first place he is our cousin; and Laura likes him; and you know we girls must marry somebody. You can't get commissions and nominations for us, more's the pity; so we must marry. And Laura may as well have Stanton as any one else, don't you think? and of course in that case she ought to be on good terms with her mother-in-law; and people expect us——"

"Oh, that will do," said Sir Henry, "ask whom you like, only free me from all this clatter. But keep that woman off me with her sanctified airs, confound her," said the baronet. He had forgiven Geoff for being born, but he could not forgive Geoff's mother for bringing him so unnecessarily into the world.

And thus it was that Geoff and his mother were at Elfdale. The elder Lady Stanton was no more disposed to go than Sir Henry was to ask her. Visits of this kind are not rare—the inviters unwilling to ask, the invited indisposed to go; and with such cordial results as might be anticipated. "I care for nobody in that house except Cousin Mary," Lady Stanton said, "and even she perhaps—though it is wrong to say so, Geoff, my dear boy, for of course everybody means for the best." With these mutual objections the party had met all the same. The other Lady Stanton was very mild and very religious. She could not prevent herself from having an occasional opinion—that is to say, as she explained it herself, for "caring for" one person more than another; but that was because she had not seen enough of the others perhaps—had not quite understood them. "Yes, Geoff, I do not doubt, my dear, that the girls are very nice. So many things are changed since my time. Manners are different. And we are all such prejudiced, unjust creatures, we constantly take the outside for our standard as if that was everything. There is but One that sees fully, and what a blessing,

Geoff, that it is Him whom we have most to deal with!" said his mother. For it was one of her troubles in life that she had uneasy instincts about the people she met with; and likings and dislikings such as she felt—the latter at least—a true Christian ought not to indulge in. There was a constant conflict of duty in her against such rebellious feelings. As for Cousin Mary, Sir Henry Stanton's wife, she was one of those whom Geoff's mother had no difficulty in liking, but a cold doubt had been breathed into her mind as to the "influence" which this lady might exercise over her boy. She could not quite get it out of her thoughts. Mary could mean no harm, that was certain, but—and then Lady Stanton would upbraid herself for the evil imagination that could thus believe in evil. So that altogether she was not happy to go to Elfdale. When she was there, however, the family paid her a sort of court, though the girls frankly considered her a hypocrite. What did that matter? "All the people one meets with are humbugs more or less," Lydia said with superior philosophy. Lydia was the one who saw through everybody, and was always unmasking false pretensions. Laura only acquiesced in the discoveries her sister made, and generally followed her in whatever was going on.

The morning of the birthday dawned brightly and promised to be all that could be desired, and the presents were pretty enough to please any *débutante*. Laura was nineteen, and so far as the county gaieties went she had been already "out" for nearly a year. Any more splendid introduction into society had been denied to the girls. They had entertained dreams of London, and had practised curtseys for a problematical drawing-room during one whole year, but it had come to nothing, Sir Henry being economical and Lady Stanton shy. It was to their step-mother's account that Laura and Lydia set down this wrong, feeling convinced that if she had been their *real* mother she would have managed it somehow. "You'll see she'll find some way of doing it when these little things grow up," the elder sisters said to each other, and they bore her a grudge in consequence, and looked at her with glances of reproaches whenever London was spoken of—though that she was not their real mother could not be held to be poor Mary's fault. However, all this was forgotten

on the merry morning, when with the delights of the garden party and a dance before them they came to breakfast and found Laura's place at table blocked up with presents. Many of them it is true were not of very much value, but there was a pretty bracelet from Geoff and a locket from his mother, which amply rewarded the young ladies for their determination to have their cousin and his mother invited. The opening of the presents made a little pleasant commotion. The donors were all moved by an agreeable curiosity to see how their gifts were received, and as Laura was lavish in her expressions of delight and Lydia in generous admiration, and the little girls hovered behind in fluttering awe, curiosity, and excitement, a general air of family concord, sympathy, and happiness was diffused over the scene. There was not very much love perhaps in the ill-compacted household. But Sir Henry could not help sharing the infection of the half-real amiability of the moment, and his wife could not but brighten under any semblance of kindness. They sat down quite happily to breakfast and began to chatter about the amusements of the afternoon. Even little Fanny and Annie were allowed to have their say. To them was allotted a share in the croquet, even in the delightful responsibility of arranging the players. All the old fogies, the old-fashioned people, the curate and his sister, the doctor and his niece, the humbler neighbours, were reserved for that pastime which is out of fashion—the girls kept the gayer circle and the more novel amusements for Geoff and their own set. And moved by the general good-nature of the moment Sir Henry made apologies to his guests for the occupations which would occupy his morning. He was an active magistrate, and found in this version of public duty a relief from the idleness of his retired life.

"I have that scamp Bampfylde in hand again," he said ; "he is never out of mischief. Have you ever seen that fellow, Geoff ? Wild Bampfylde they call him. I think the keepers have a sneaking kindness for him. There is not a poaching trick he is not up to. I am tired of hearing his name."

"What did you say was his name?" said Geoff's mother.

The other Lady Stanton had looked up too with a little start, which attracted Geoff's attention. He stopped short in the

middle of an animated discussion with the girls on the arrangements of the afternoon, to hear what was being said.

"Ah! to be sure—Bampfylde; for the moment I had forgotten," Sir Henry said. "Yes—that family of course, and a handsome fellow; as fine a man as you could see in the north country. Certainly they are a good-looking race."

"I suppose it is gipsy blood," said the elder Lady Stanton, with a sigh. "Poor people! Yes, I say poor people, Sir Henry, for there is no one to care what evil ways they take. So far out of the way among the hills, no teaching, no clergyman; oh, I make every excuse for them! They will not be judged as we are, with our advantages."

"I don't know about our advantages," said Sir Henry, somewhat grimly; "but I sha'n't make excuses for them. A pest to the country; not to speak of the tragedy they were involved in——"

"Oh, don't let us speak of that," said Mary, under her breath.

Sir Henry gave her a look which irritated young Geoff. The young man felt himself his beautiful cousin's champion, and he would have liked to call even her husband to account for such a glance under frowning eyebrows at so gentle a creature. Sir Henry for his part did not like his wife to show any signs of recollecting her own past history. He did not do very much to make her forget it, and was a cold and indifferent husband, but still he was affronted that she should be able to remember that she had not always been his wife.

"I wish it did not hurt you, Cousin Mary," said Geoff, interposing, "for I should like to speak of it, to have it all gone into. I am sure there is wrong somewhere. You said yourself about that young Musgrave——"

"Oh hush, hush, Geoff!" she said under her breath.

"He cannot be young now," said the elder lady. "I am very sorry for him too, my dear. It is not given to us to see into men's hearts, but I never believed that John Musgrave—— I beg your pardon, Mary, for naming him before you, of course it must be painful. And to me too. But it is such a long time ago, and I think if it were all to do over again——"

"It would have been done over again and the whole case

sifted if John Musgrave had not behaved like a fool, or a guilty man," said Sir Henry. "It is not a pleasant subject for discussion, is it? I was an idiot to bring up the fellow's name. I forgot what good memories you ladies have," he said, getting up and breaking up the party. And there was still a frown upon his face as he looked at his wife.

"What is the matter with papa?" cried the girls in a breath. "You have been upsetting him. You have worried him somehow!" exclaimed Lydia, turning upon her stepmother. "And everything was going so well, and he was in such a good humour. But it is always the way just when we want a little peace and comfort. I never saw such a house as ours! And he is not very unreasonable, not when you know how to manage him—papa."

As for Mary, she broke down and cried, but smiled again, trying to keep up appearances. "It is nothing," she said; "your father is not angry. It will all be right in a moment. I suppose I am very silly. Run, little ones, and bring me some eau-de-cologne, quick! You must not think Sir Henry was really annoyed," she said, turning to Lady Stanton. "He is just a little impatient; you know he has all his old Indian ways; and I am so silly."

"I don't think you are silly," said Lady Stanton, who herself was flushed and excited. "It was natural you should be disturbed, and I too. Sir Henry need not have been so impatient; but we don't know his motives," she added hastily, with the habitual apology she made for everybody who was or seemed in the wrong.

"Oh, how tiresome it all is," cried Lydia, stamping her foot, "when people will make scenes! Come along, Geoff; come with us and let us see what is to be done. Everything has to be done still. I meant to ask papa to give the orders; but when he is put out, it is all over. Do come; there are the hoops to put up, and everything to do. Laura, never mind your tiresome presents. Come along! or the people will be here, and nothing will be done."

"That is how they always go on," said Laura, following her sister with her lap full of her treasures. "Come, Geoff. It is

so easy to put papa out ; and when he is put out he is no good for anything. Do come. I do not think this time, Lydia, it was *her* fault."

"Oh, it is always her fault," said the harsher sister : "and sending these two tiresome children for the eau-de-cologne ! She always sends them for the eau-de-cologne. As if that could do any good ! like putting out a fire with rose-water. There now, Laura, put your rubbish away, and I will begin settling everything with Geoff."

The young man obeyed the call unwillingly ; but he went with his cousins, having no excuse to stay, and did their work obediently, though his mind was full of very different things. He had put aside the Musgrave business since his visit to Penninghame, not knowing how to act, and he had not spoken of it to his mother ; but now it returned upon him with greater interest than ever. Bampfylde he knew was the name of the girl whom John Musgrave had married, whom his brother Walter had loved, and whom the quarrel was about ; and she it was who, with her mother, had been accused of helping young Musgrave's escape. All the story seemed to reopen even upon him with the name ; and how much more upon those two ladies who were so much more deeply interested. The two girls and their games had but a slight hold of Geoff's mind in comparison with this deeper question. He did what they wanted him, but he was *distract* and preoccupied ; and as soon as he was free went anxiously in search of his mother, who, he hoped, would tell him more about it. He knew all about it, but not as people must do who had been involved in the circumstances, and helped to enact that sad drama of real life. He found his mother very thoughtful and preoccupied too, seated alone in a little sitting-room up-stairs, which was Lady Stanton's special sanctum. The elder Lady Stanton was very serious. She welcomed her son with a momentary smile and no more. "I have been thinking over that dreadful story," she said ; "it has all come back upon me, Geoff. Sometimes a name is enough to bring back years of one's life. I was then as Mary is now. No, no, my dear, your good father was very different from Sir Henry; but a stepmother is often not very happy. It used to be the other way, the

story-books say. Oh, Geoff, young people don't mean it—they don't think; but they can make a poor woman's life very wretched. It has brought everything back to me. That—and the name of this man."

" You have never told me much about it, mother."

" What was the use, my dear? You were too young to do anything; and then, what was there to do? Poor Mr. Musgrave fled, you know. Everybody said that was such a pity. It would have been brought in only manslaughter if he had not escaped and gone away."

" Then it was madness and cowardice," said Geoff.

" It was the girl," said his mother. " No, I am not blaming her; perhaps she knew no better. And his father and all his family were so opposed. Perhaps they thought, to fly away out of everybody's reach, the two together, was the best way out of it. When young people are so much attached to each other," said the anxious mother, faltering, half afraid even to speak of such mysteries to her son, " they are tempted to think that being together is everything. But it is not everything, Geoff. Many others, as well as John Musgrave, have lost themselves for such a delusion as that."

" Is it a delusion?" Geoff asked, making his mother tremble. Of whom could the boy be thinking? He was thinking of nobody—till it suddenly occurred to him how the eyes of that little girl at Penninghame might look if they were older; and that most likely it was the same eyes which had made up to John Musgrave for the loss of everything. After all, perhaps this unfortunate one, whom everybody pitied, might have had some compensation. As he was thinking thus, and his mother was watching him, very anxious to know what he was thinking, Lady Stanton came in suddenly by a private door, which opened from her own room. She had a little additional colour on her cheeks, and was breathless with haste.

" Oh, where is Geoff, I wonder?" she said; then seeing him, ran up to him. " Geoff, there is some one down-stairs you will like to see. If you are really so interested in all that sad story—really so anxious to help poor John——"

" Yes, who is it? Tell me who it is, and I will go."

"Elizabeth Bampfylde is down-stairs," she said, breathless, putting her hand to her heart. "The mother of the man Sir Henry was speaking of—the mother of—the girl. There is no one knows so much as that woman. She is sitting there all alone, and there is nobody in the way."

"Mary!" cried the elder lady, "is it right to plunge my boy into it? We have suffered enough already. Is it right to make Geoff a victim—Geoff, who knows nothing about it? Oh, my dear, I know you mean it for the best!"

Mary fell back abashed and troubled.

"I did not mean to harm him, Lady Stanton. I did not think it would harm him. Never mind; never mind, if your mother does not approve. After all, perhaps, she knows no more than we do," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "The sight of her made me forget myself."

"Where is she?" said the young man.

"Ah! that is just what overcame me," said Mary, with a sob, and a strange smile at the irony of fate—"down-stairs in my husband's room. I have seen her often in the road and in the village—but here, in my house! Never mind, Geoff; it was she that helped him to get out of prison. They were bold, they had no fear of anything; not like us, who are ladies, who cannot stir a step without being watched. Never mind, never mind! it is not really of any consequence. She is sitting there in—in *my* husband's room!" Mary said, with a sob and a little hysterical laugh. It was not strange to the others, but simple enough and natural. She alone knew how strange it was. "But stop, stop—oh, don't pay any attention. Don't go now, Geoff!"

"Geoff! my dear Geoff!" cried his mother running to the door after him, but for once Geoff paid no attention. He hurried down-stairs, clearing them four or five steps at a time. The ladies could not have followed him if they would. The door of Sir Henry's business room stood open, and he could see an old woman seated like a statue, in perfect stillness, on a bench against the wall. She wore a large grey cloak with a hood falling back upon her shoulders, and a white cap, and sat with her hands crossed in her lap, waiting. She raised her eyes quickly when he came in with a look of anxiety and expectation,

but when she found it was not the person she expected, bowed her fine head resignedly and relapsed into quiet. The delay which is always so irksome did not seem to affect her. There was something in the pose of the figure which showed that to be seated there quite still and undisturbed was not disagreeable to her. She was not impatient. She was an old woman and glad to rest ; she could wait.

" You are waiting for Sir Henry ? " Geoff said, in his eagerness. " Have you seen him ? Can I do anything for

" No, sir. I hope you'll forgive me rising. I have walked far and I'm tired. Time is not of so much consequence now as it used to be. I can bide." She gave him a faint smile as she spoke, and looked at him with eyes undimmed, eyes that reminded him of the child at Penninghame. Her voice was fine too, large and melodious, and there was nothing fretful or fidgety about her. Except for one line in her forehead everything about her was calm. She could bide.

And this is a power which gives its possessor unbounded superiority over the impatient and restless. Geoff was all curiosity, excitement, and eagerness. " I don't think Sir Henry will have any time for you to-day," he said ; " tell me what it is. I will do all I can for you. I should like to be of use to you. Sir Henry is going to his luncheon presently. I don't think you will see him to-day."

Just at this moment a servant came in with the same information, but it was given in a somewhat different tone. " Look here, old lady," said the man, " you'll have to clear out of this. There's a party this afternoon, and Sir Henry he hasn't got any time for the likes of you. So march is the word.—I beg your lordship ten thousand pardons. I didn't see as your lordship was there."

" You had better learn to be civil to every one," said Geoff, indignantly ; " beg *her* pardon, not mine. You are—Mrs. Bampfylde, I think? May I speak to you, since Sir Henry cannot see you ? I have very urgent business—"'

She rose slowly, paying no attention to the man—looking only at Geoff. " And you are the young lord ? " she said with an

intent look. There was a certain dignity about her movements, though she seemed to set herself in motion with difficulty, stiffly, as if the exertion cost her something. "I've had a long walk," she added, with a faint smile and half apology for the effort, "there's where age tells. And all my trouble for nothing!"

"If I can be of any use to you I will," said Geoff. Then he paused and added, "I want you to do something for me."

"What is it that old 'Lizabeth Bampfylde could do for a fine young gentleman? Your fortune?—ay, I'll give you your fortune easy; a kind tongue and a bright eye carries that all over the world. And you look as if you had a kind heart."

"It is not my fortune," he said with an involuntary smile.

"You're no believer in the likes of that? May be you have never met with one that had the power. It runs in families; it runs in the blood. There was one of your house, my young lord, that I could have warned of what was coming. I saw it in his face. And, oh that I had done it! But he would not have been warned. Oh! what that would have sayed me and mine, as well as you and yours!"

"You think of my brother then when you see me?" he said, eager at once to follow out this beginning. She looked at him again with a scrutinizing gaze.

"What had I to do with your brother, young gentleman? He never asked me for his fortune any more than you; he did not believe in the likes of me. It is only the silly folk and the simple folk that believe in us. I wish they would be guided by us that are our own flesh and blood — and then they would never get into trouble like my boy."

"What has he done?" asked Geoff, thinking to conciliate. He had followed her out of the house, and was walking by her side through the shrubberies by the back way.

"What has he done? Something, nothing. He's taken a fish in the river, or a bird out of the wood. They're God's creatures, not yours, or Sir Henry's. But the rich and the great, that have every dainty they can set their face to, make it a crime for a poor lad when he does that."

Geoff did not make any answer, for he had a respect for game,

and would not commit himself ; but he said, “ I will do anything I can for your son, if you will help me. Yes, you can help me, and I think you know you can, Mrs. Bampfylde.”

“ I am called ‘Elizabeth,’ ” said the old woman, with dignity, as if she had said, I am called Princess. Her tone had so much effect upon Geoff that he cried, “ I beg your pardon,” instinctively, and faltered and coloured as he went on—

“ I want to know about what happened when I was a child—about my brother’s death—about—the man who caused it. They tell me you know more than any one else. I am not asking for idle curiosity. You know a great deal, or so I have heard, about John Musgrave.”

“ Hus—sh ! ” she cried, “ it is not safe to say names—you never know who may hear.”

“ But all the world may hear,” said Geoff. “ I am not afraid. I want him to come home. I want him to be cleared. If you know anything that can help him, tell me. I will never rest now till I have got that sentence changed and he is cleared.”

The old woman looked at him, growing pale, with a sort of alarmed admiration. “ You’re a bold boy,” she said, “ very bold ! It’s because you’re so young—how should you know ? When a man has enemies we should be carefnl how we name him. It might bring ill-luck or more harm.”

“ I don’t believe much in ill-luck, and I don’t believe in enemies at all,” said Geoff, with the confidence of his years.

“ Oh ! ” she cried, with a long moan, wringing her hands. “ Oh, God help you, innocent boy ! ”

“ No,” Geoff repeated, more boldly still, “ neither in enemies nor in ill-luck, if the man himself is innocent. But I believe in friends. I am one ; and if you are one—if you are his friend, his true friend, why, there is nothing we may not do for him,” the young man cried, standing still to secure her attention. She paused too for a moment, gazing at him, with a low cry now and then of wonder and distress ; her mind was travelling over regions to which young Geoff had no clue, but his courage and confidence had compelled her attention at least. She listened while he went on repeating his appeal ; only to tell him what she knew, what she remembered—to tell him everything. It

seemed all so simple to Geoff ; he went on with his pleadings, following through the winding walk. It was all he could do to keep up with her large and steady stride as she went on quickening her pace. The stiffness had disappeared, and she walked like one accustomed to long tramping over moor and hill.

" My young lord," she exclaimed abruptly, stopping him in the midst of a sentence, " you've talked long enough ; I know all you can say now ; and here's the bargain I'll make. If my lad gets free, I'll take his advice—and if he consents, and you have a mind to come up to the fells and see me where I bide——"

" Certainly I will come," cried Geoff, feeling a delightful gleam of adventure suddenly light up his more serious purpose. " Certainly I will come ; only tell me where I shall find you——"

" You're going too fast, my young gentleman. I said if my lad gets free. Till I have talked to him I'll tell you nothing. And my bit of a place is a lonely place where few folk ever come near."

" I can find it," said Geoff. " I do not mind how lonely it is. I will come—to-morrow, whenever you please."

" Not till my lad comes to fetch you," said 'Lizabeth, with a gleam of shrewd humour crossing her face for a moment. " I must see my lad first, and hear what he says, and then I'll send him to show you the way."

" It would be better not to make it dependent on that chance," said Geoff prudently. " He might not care to come ; I don't know your son ; why should he take so much trouble for me ? He may decline to do it, or he may dislike my interference, or——"

" Or he may not get free," said 'Lizabeth, stopping short, and dismissing her young attendant almost imperiously. " Here you and me part paths, my young lord. It will be soon enough to say more when my lad is free."

Geoff was left standing at the outer gate, startled by the abruptness of his dismissal, but incapable he felt of resisting. He gazed after her as she sped along the road with long swift steps, ~~half-appalled~~, greatly excited, and with a touch of

amusement too. "I am to cheat justice for her in the first place, and elude the law," he said to himself as he watched her disappearing along the dusty road.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW FRIEND.

THE result of this interview was that Geoff, as was natural, threw himself body and soul into the cause of Wild Bampfylde. When he had once made up his mind to this, a certain comic element in the matter delighted him and gave him double fervour. The idea of defeating justice was delightful to the young man, not much older than a schoolboy. He talked to all the people he met about the case of this wild man of the woods, this innocent savage, to whom all the sylvan sins came by nature ; and he engaged the best lawyer who could be had to defend him, and if possible get the wild fellow free. Where was the harm ? Wild Bampfylde had never been guilty of violence to any human creature, he ascertained. It was only the creatures of the woods he waged war against, not even the gamekeepers. And when Sir Henry, coming home from Quarter Sessions, informed the party that Wild Bampfylde had managed to get off by some quibble, the magistrates being fairly tired of convicting him, everybody was delighted to hear of the safety of Geoff's *protégé* except the two elder ladies, who showed no satisfaction. Neither of them were glad, notwithstanding that Geoff was so much interested ; Lady Stanton from a vague concern for her son, and Mary because of the prejudice in her which all her gentleness could not eradicate. She looked at Geoff with tears in her eyes. "You will have nothing to do with them," she said ; "him nor any of them ? Oh, Geoff, promise !" which was inconsistent, as it was she herself who had put the old mother in his way. But Geoff only laughed, and asked what he could have to do with them, and made no promise. This episode had not interfered with the business of life, with the afternoon party or the dinner, the dancing or the croquet. All had "gone off" as well as

possible. Laura and Lydia had "enjoyed themselves" to their hearts' content. They had been admired and praised and fêted, and every one had said it was a delightful party. What more could any young lady of nineteen desire? Geoff was very good-natured, and did everything that was asked of him. And Laura wore his bracelet, which was much admired by her friends, and gave rise to many pleasant suggestions. "He is just the very person for you," Lydia said reflectively, as she examined it. "Now I should have liked emeralds or diamonds, or grown-up jewels; but the turquoises are the very thing for you. He sees your taste. If he were not Lord Stanton, just for simple suitableness you should marry Geoff—he is the very person for you."

"I do not see why I should be made to marry any one for simple suitableness, as if I were a baby," was Laura's protestation; but she liked the turquoises, and she did not dislike the hints and smiling gossip. And when young Lord Stanton and his mother went away, the house regretted them from the highest to the lowest. The little girls stood behind backs, crying, when the carriage drove away. "I should like to know what they have to cry about," Lydia said; "what is Geoff to them? It is such nonsense; but they always are encouraged in everything. You two little things, stop that, and be off with you! You are always in some one's way."

"He is as much our cousin as yours," said Fanny, who was always known to be saucy; but they skinned away in a panic when Lydia turned round upon them, not knowing what she might do. "Oh, how nice it would be to have nothing but a mamma!" they said to each other as they alighted in her room, where it was always quiet, and smoothed down their ruffled plumes. Poor little doves! it was not for Geoff alone they were crying, for Geoff's mother had been very good to them. They had hung about her for hours, and had stories told to them, and the world seemed an empty sort of place when these two visitors went away.

The mother and son drove home to their own house, he a little sorry, she a little glad. It was wrong perhaps to be glad, implying a kind of tacit censure on the people she had left; but

there was no harm in being happy to get home. Stanton Hall was not an immemorial place like Penninghame, nor a cosy unpretending country house like Elfdale, but a great mansion intended to be grand and splendid, and overawe the country. The splendour had fallen into a little disuse during Geoff's long minority, but as he had lived chiefly at home with his mother, it had proportionately gained in comfort and the home aspect which only being lived in can give to a house. They lived chiefly in one wing, leaving the state part of the mansion almost unoccupied. Geoff had not been brought up as most youths of his age are brought up. His mother had been too timorous, both physically and spiritually, to trust her child amid all the appalling dangers and indulgences of a public school. And he had not even, more wonderful still, gone to any university. She was his sole guardian, no one sharing her powers, for it never had been supposed that little Geoff would be anybody in particular, or that it was of the least importance how his mother brought him up. His education had therefore been chiefly conducted at home by a tutor, chosen rather for his goodness than his learning. Did it matter very much? Geoff was not very clever, and it does not require much learning, as Mrs. Hardcastle concluded in the case of her son Tony Lumpkin, to spend fifteen thousand a year. Geoff had learned a great many things which university men do not much meddle with, and he had forgotten as successfully as any university man could do. He had a great deal less Greek, but a good deal more French than most of those heroes; and he was a good, honest, simple-hearted boy, as, Heaven be praised, in spite of their many advantages, a great many of those same university men manage to be. And, in short, he was very much like his contemporaries, though brought up so very differently—a fact which would have wounded his mother's feelings more than anything else you could have said; for if the result is just about the same as it would have been by the other process, what is the good of taking a great deal of additional trouble? Mr. Tritton, the tutor, had been all alone at Stanton during this visit to Elfdale. He was a very good man. He had been as kind as a father to Geoff from the moment he took charge of him, and had watched over him with unfailing care;

indeed he was like a second mother as well—perhaps more like that than the other—very anxious not to “over-tire” his pupil, or to put any strain on his faculties. They were the most peaceful household that could be conceived, and Geoff, according to all rule, ought to have grown up a very feminine youth. But by good luck he had not done so. In that demure household he got to be a lively, energetic, out-door sort of person, and loved adventure, and loved life perhaps all the better in consequence of the meek atmosphere of quietness which surrounded him. To tell the truth it was he who, for a long time, had held the helm of the house in his hand, and had everything his own way.

Mr. Tritton was upon the steps to welcome them, and the servants, who were glad to see them back after the week of quiet. Who does not know the kind of servants Lady Stanton would have?—men and women who had seen the boy grow up, and thought or seemed to think there was nobody in the world like Geoff—a housekeeper to whom her mistress was very obsequious and conciliatory, but whom Geoff treated with a familiarity which sometimes froze the very blood in his mother’s veins, who would not for the world have taken such liberties; and a butler, who felt himself an independent country gentleman, and went and came very much at his own pleasure, and governed his inferiors *en bon prince*, but with a lively sense of his own importance. These all received the travellers with cordiality at the door, and brought them tea and were very kind to them. It was quite touching and gratifying to Lady Stanton that they should always be so kind. Harris, the butler, took her little travelling-bag, and carried it into the drawing-room with his own hand; and Mrs. Benson herself came to pour out her cup of tea. “I hope your ladyship is not too much tired with your long drive,” Mrs. Benson said; and Harris kindly lingered to hear her reply, and to assure her that all had been going on well at Stanton while she was away.

Geoff did not pay so much attention to the kindness of the servants. He went off to the stables to give some orders, leaving Mr. Tritton with his mother. Geoff called his tutor Old Tritton as easily as if he had mixed in the world of men at Eton or Oxford, and went off about his own business unconcerned. But

when he had turned the corner of the house to the stables, Geoff's whistle stopped suddenly. He found a man standing there with his back against the wall, whose appearance startled him. A poacher is a thing that is obnoxious to every country gentleman, however easy his principles may be on the question of game; and a tramp is a thing that nobody with a house worth robbing can away with. The figure that presented itself thus suddenly before Lord Stanton's eyes was the quintessence of both; a tall, loose-limbed man, with strong black locks and an olive skin, in coarse velveteen and gaiters, and a coat with multitudinous pockets, with a red handkerchief knotted round his neck, a soft felt hat crushed into all manner of shapes, and a big stick in his hand. He stood in a careless attitude, at his ease, leaning against the wall. What had such a man to do there? and yet there he was for a purpose, as any one could see, lying in wait; was it to rob, or to kill? Geoff's heart gave a little leap at the sight of the intruder. He had not had much experience of this kind.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sharply, the instincts of property and authority springing up in disapproval and resistance. What had such a fellow to do here?

"I am doing nothing," said the man, not changing his attitude, or even taking off his hat, or showing the smallest mark of respect. He continued even to lounge against the wall with rude indifference. "I am here on your business, not on mine," he said, carelessly.

"On my business! Yes, I know," said Geoff, suddenly bethinking himself; "you are Bampfylde? I am glad you've got off; and you come to me from——"

"Old 'Lizabeth; that is about it. She's a funny woman: whatever silly thing she wants she always gets her way. She wants you now, and I've come to fetch you. I suppose you'll come, since she says it. And you'd better make up your mind soon, for it does not suit me to stay here."

"I suppose not," said Geoff, scarcely noticing what he said.

"Why should you suppose not!" said the man, rousing himself with an air of offence. He was taller than Geoff, a lanky but muscular figure. I have eyes and feelings as well as you.

I like a fine place. Why shouldn't I take my pleasure looking at it? You have a deal more, and yet you're not content."

"We were not discussing our feelings," said Geoff, half contemptuous, half sympathetic. "You have brought me a message, perhaps from your mother?"

"I've come from old 'Elizabeth. She says if you like to start to-night along with me we'll talk your business over, and if she can satisfy you she will. Look you here, my young lord, your lordship's a deal of consequence to some, but it's nothing to her and me. Come, if you like to come; it's your business, not our's. If there's danger it's your own risk, if there's any good it's you that will have it, not us—"

"Danger!" said Geoff; "the danger of a walk up the fells! and good—to me? Yes, you can say it is to me if you like, but you ought to be more interested than I am. However, words don't matter. Yes, let us say the good is mine, and the danger, if any, is mine—"

"Have it your own way," said Bampfylde. I'll come back again, since you've made up your mind, at ten to-night and show you the way."

"But why at night?" said Geoff; "to-morrow would be better. It is not too far to go in a day."

"There's the difference between you and us. Night is our time, you see. It must be by night or not at all. Would you like to walk with me across country, my lord? I don't think you would, nor I wouldn't like it. We shouldn't look natural together. But at night all's one. I'll be here at ten; there's a moon—and a two hours' walk, or say three at the most, it's nothing to a young fellow like you."

This was a very startling proposition, and Geoff did not know what to make of it. It grew more and more like a mysterious adventure, and pleased him on that side; but he was a modern young man, with a keen perception of absurdity, and everything melodramatic was alarming to him. Why should he walk mysteriously in the middle of the night to a cottage about which there need be no mystery on a perfectly innocent and honest errand? He stared at his strange visitor with a perplexity beyond words.

"What possible object could be gained," he said at last, "by going in the night?"

"Oh, if you're afraid!" said this strange emissary, "don't go—that's all about it: neither me nor her are forcing you to hear what we may happen to know."

"I am not afraid," said Geoff, colouring. It was an accusation which was very hard to bear. "But there is reason in all things. I don't want to be ridiculous—" The man shrugged his shoulders—he laughed—nothing could have been more galling. Geoff standing, looking at him, felt the blood boiling in his veins.

"Quite right too," said Bampfylde. "What can we know that's worth the trouble? You'll take a drive up some day in your coach and four, and oblige us. That is just what I would do myself."

"In Heaven's name, what am I expected to do?" cried Geoff; "make a melodramatic ass of myself, and go in the middle of the night?"

"I'm no scholar: long words are not my sort. Do or don't, that's the thing I understand, and it is easy to settle. If you're not coming, say No, and I'll go. If you are coming, let me know, and I'll be here. There's nothing to make such a wonder about."

Geoff was in great doubt what was best to do. The adventure pleased him; but the idea of ridicule held him back. "It is not pleasant to be thought a fool," he said. Then, nettled by the jeer in the face of this strange fellow who kept his eyes—great, dark, and brilliant as they were—fixed upon him, the young man cut the knot hurriedly. "Then never mind the absurdity; be here at ten, as you say, and wait if I am not ready. I don't want everybody to know what a fool I am," he said.

"You are coming then?" said the man with a laugh. "That's plucky whatever happens. You're not afraid?"

"Pooh!" cried Geoff, turning away. He was too indignant and annoyed to speak. He went on impatiently to the stables, leaving the stranger where he stood. He was not afraid; but his young frame thrilled in every fibre with excitement. Had not adventures of this kind sounded somewhat ridiculous to the ideas of to-day, the mysterious expedition would have been

delightful to him. But that uneasy sense of the ridiculous kept down his anticipations. What could old 'Lizabeth have to tell that could justify such precautions? But if she chose to be fantastic about her secret, whatever it was, he must humour her. When he went in again, there was no sign of his visitor, except the half-effaced mark of a footprint on the soft gravel. The man had ground the heel of his boot into it while he stood talking, and there it was, his mark to show the place where he had been.

The evening passed very strangely to young Lord Stanton. He heard his mother and Mr. Tritton talking calmly of to-morrow. To-morrow the old family lawyer was expected, and some of the arrangements attendant on his coming of age, which was approaching, were to be discussed; and he was asked, What he would like—in one or two respects. Should this be done, or that, when his birthday came? Geoff could not tell what curious trick of imagination affected him. He caught himself asking, Would he ever come of age? Would to-morrow be just as the other days, no more and no less? How absurd the question was! What could possibly happen to him in a long mountain walk, even though it might be through the darkness? There is nothing in that homely innocent country to make midnight dangerous. Wild Bamfylde might be an exciting sort of companion; but what more? As for enemies, Geoff remembered what he had said so short a time before. He did not believe in them; why should he? he himself, he felt convinced, possessed no such thing in all the world.

But it was astonishing how difficult it was that evening to get free. Lady Stanton, who generally was fatigued with the shortest journey, was cheerful and talkative to-night, and overflowing with plans; and even Mr. Tritton was entertaining. It was only by saying that he had letters to write that Geoff at last managed to get away. He disliked writing letters so much that the plea was admitted with smiles. "We must not balk such a virtuous intention," the tutor said. He went into the library with a beating heart. This room had a large window which opened upon the old-fashioned bowling-green. Geoff changed his dress with great speed and quiet, putting on a rough shooting suit.

The night was dark, but soft, with stars faintly lighting up a hazy sky. He stepped out from the big window and closed it after him. The air was very fresh, a little chilly, as even a midsummer night generally is in the north country. He gave a little nervous shiver as he came out into the darkness and chillness. "There's some one walking over your grave," said a voice at his elbow. Geoff started, to his own intense shame and annoyance, as if he had received a shot. "Very likely," he said, commanding himself; "over all our graves perhaps. That harms nobody. You are there, Bampfylde? That's well; don't talk, but go on."

"You're a good bold one after all," said the voice by his side. Geoff's heart beat uneasily at the sound, and yet the commendation gave him a certain pleasure. He was more at his ease when they emerged from the shadow of the house, and he could see the outline of his companion's figure, and realize him as something more than a voice. He gave a somewhat longing look back at the scattered lights in the windows as he set out thus through the silence and darkness. Would any one find out that he was gone? But his spirit rose as they went on, at a steady pace, swinging along under the deep hedgerows, and across the frequent bridges where so many streamlets kept crossing the road, adding an unseen tinkle to the sounds of the summer night.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MIDNIGHT WALK.

WHEN young Lord Stanton left his own house with Wild Bampfylde there was a tingle of excitement in the young man's veins. Very few youths of his age are to be found so entirely home-bred as Geoff. He had never been in the way of mischief, and he had no natural tendency to lead him thitherward, so that he had passed these first twenty years of his existence without an adventure, without anything occurring to him that might not have been known to all the world. To leave your own house

when other people are thinking of going to bed, for an expedition you know not where, under the guidance of you know not whom, is a sufficiently striking beginning to the path of mystery and adventure, and there was a touch of personal peril in it which gave Geoff a little tingle in his veins. His brother had been killed by some one with whom this wild fellow was closely connected ; it was a secret of blood which the young man had set himself to solve one way or other ; and this no doubt affected his imagination, and for a short time the consciousness of danger was strong in him, quickening his pulses and making his heart beat. This was increased by a sense of wrong-doing, in so far as Geoff felt that he might be exposing the tranquil household he had left behind to agonies of apprehension about him, did he not return sufficiently early to escape being found out. Finally, on the top of this consciousness of conditional fault came a feeling, perhaps the most strong of all, of the possible absurdity of his position. Romantic adventure, if it never ceases to be attractive to the young, is looked upon with different eyes at different periods, and the nineteenth century has agreed to make a joke of melodrama. Instead of being moved by a fine romantic situation, the modern youth laughs ; and the idea of finding himself in such picturesque and dramatic circumstances strikes him as the most curious and laughable, if not ridiculous, idea. To recognize himself as setting out, like the hero of a novel or a play (of the old school), to search out a mystery—into the haunts of a law-defying and probably law-breaking class, under the guidance of a theatrical vagrant, tramp, or gipsy, to ask counsel of the weird old woman, bright-eyed and solemn, who held all the threads of the story in her hands, filled Geoff with mingled confusion and amusement. He had almost laughed to himself as he realized it ; but with the laugh a flush came over his face—what would other people think ? He felt that he would be laughed at as romantic, jibed at as being able to believe that any real or authentic information could be obtained in this ridiculous way. 'Elizabeth Bampfylde in the witness-box would no doubt be valuable, but the romances she might tell in her own house, to a young man evidently so credulous and of such a theatrical temperament — these two things were

entirely different, and he would be thoroughly laughed at for his foolishness.

This consciousness of something ridiculous in the whole business reassured him, however; and better feelings rose as he went on with a half-pleased, half-excited, exhilaration and curiosity. The night was fine, warm, and genial, but dark; a few stars shone large and lambent in the veiled sky, but there was as yet no moon, so that all the light there was was concentrated above in the sky, and the landscape underneath was wrapped in darkness, a soft, cool, incense-breathing obscurity—for night is as full of odours as the morning. It is full of sounds too, all the more mysterious for having no kind of connection with the visible; and no country is so full of sounds as the North country, where the road will now thread the edge of a dark, unseen, heathery, thymy moor, and now cross, at a hundred links and folds, the course of some invisible stream, or some dozens of little runlets tinkling on their way to a bigger home of waters. Now dark hedgerows would close in the path; now it would open up and widen into that world of space, the odorous, dewy moorland; now lead by the little street, the bridge, the straggling outskirts of a village. Generally all was quiet in the hamlets, the houses closed, the inhabitants in bed; but sometimes there would be a sudden gleam of lightness into the night, a dazzle from an open door or unshuttered window. The first of these rural places was Stanton, the village close to the great House, where Geoff unconsciously stole closer into the shadow, afraid to be seen. Here it was the smithy that was still open, a dazzling centre of light in the gloom. The smith came forward to his door as they passed, roused by the steady tread of their footsteps, and looked curiously out upon them, his figure relieved against the red background of light. “What, Dick! is’t you, lad?” he said, peering out. “Got off again? that’s right, that’s right; and who’s that along with you this fine night?” Bampfylde did not stop to reply, to Geoff’s great relief. He went on with long swinging steps, taking no notice. “If anybody asks you, say you don’t know,” he said as he went on, throwing back a sort of challenge into the gloom. He did not talk to his companion. Sometimes he whistled low, but as clearly as a bird, imitating indeed the

notes of the birds, the mournful cry of the lapwing, the grating call of the corn-crake ; sometimes he would sing to himself low crooning songs. In this way they made rapid progress to the foot of the hills.

Geoff had been glad of the silence at first ; it served to deliver him from those uncomfortable thoughts which had filled his mind, the vagabond's carelessness reassuring and calming his excitement ; for neither the uneasy sense of danger he had started with, nor the equally uneasy sense of the ludicrous which had possessed him, were consistent with the presence of this easy, unexcited companion, who conducted himself as if he were alone, and would stop and listen to the whirr and flutter of wild creatures in the hedgerows or on the edge of the moor, as if he had forgotten Geoff's very presence. All became simple as they went on, the very continuance of the walk settling down and calming the agitation of the outset. By and by, however, Geoff began to be impatient of the silence, and of the interest his companion showed in everything except himself. Could he be, perhaps, one of the "naturals" who are so common in the North, a little less imbecile than usual, but still incapable of continuous attention ? Thus, after his first half-alarmed, half-curious sense of the solemnity of the enterprise, Geoff came back to an everyday boyish impatience of its unusual features and a disposition to return to the lighter intercourse of ordinary life.

"How far have we to go now ?" he asked. They had come to the end of the level, and were just about to ascend the lower slopes of hilly country which shut in the valley. The fells rising before them made the landscape still more dark and mysterious, and seemed to thrust themselves between the wayfarers' eyes and that light which seemed to retire more and more into the clear pale shining of the sky.

"Tired already ?" said the man, with a shrug of his shoulders. He had stopped to investigate a hollow under a great gorse-bush, just below the level of the road, from which came rustlings and scratchings indistinguishable. Bampfylde raised himself with a half-laugh, and came back to Geoff's side. "These small creatures is never tired," he said ; "they scuds about all day, and sleep that light at night that a breath wakes them ; and yet

they're but small, not so big as my hand ; and knows their way, they does, wherever they've got to go."

"I allow they are cleverer than I am," said Geoff, good-humouredly, "but then they cannot speak to ask their way. Men have a little advantage. And even I am not so ignorant as you think. I have been on the fells in a mist, and knew my way, or guessed it. At all events, I got home again, and that is something."

"There will be no mist to-night," said Bampfylde, looking up at the sky.

"No ; but it is dark enough for anything. Look here, I trust you, and you might trust me. You know why I am going."

"How do you trust me, my young lord ?"

"Well," said Geoff ; "supposing I am a match for you, one man against another, how can I tell you have not got comrades about ? My brother lost his life—by some one connected with you. Did you know my brother ?"

The suddenness of this question took his companion by surprise. He wavered for a moment, and fell backward with an involuntary movement of alarm.

"What's that for, lad, bringing up a dead man's name out here in the dark, and near midnight ? Do you want to fley me ? I never meddled with him. He would be safe in his bed this night, and married to his bonnie lady, and bairns in his house to heir his title and take your lordship from you, if there had been nobody but me."

"I believe that," said Geoff, softened. "They say you never harmed man."

"No, nor beast—except varmint, or the like of a hare or so—when the old wife wanted a bit o' meat. Never man. For man's blood is precious," said the wild fellow with a shudder. "There's something in it that's not in a brute. If I were to kill you or you me in this lonesome place, police and that sort might never find it out ; but all the same, the place would tell—there would be something there different ; they say man's blood never rubs out."

Geoff felt a little thrill run through his own veins as he saw his companion shiver and tremble ; but it was not fear. The

words somehow established perfect confidence between himself and his guide; and he had all the simplicity of mind of a youth whose faith had never been tampered with, and who believed with the unshaken sincerity of childhood. "The stain on the mind never wears out," he said, thoughtfully. "I knew a boy once who had shot his brother without knowing it. How horrible it was! he never forgot it; and yet it was not his fault."

"Ah! I wish as I had been that lucky—to shoot my brother by accident," said Wild Bampfylde, with a long sigh, shaking into its place a pouch or game-bag which he wore across his shoulder. "It would have been the best thing for him," he added, in answer to Geoff's cry of protest; "then he wouldn't have lived—for worse——"

"Have you a brother so unfortunate?"

"Unfortunate! I don't know if that is what you call it. Yes, unfortunate. He never meant bad. I don't credit it."

"You are not speaking," said Geoff, in a very low voice, overpowered at once with curiosity and interest, "of John Musgrave?"

"The young Squire? No, I don't mean him; he's bad, and bad enough, but not so bad. You've got a deal to learn, my young lord. And what's your concern with all that old business? If another man's miserable, *that* don't take bit or sup from you—nor a night's rest, unless you let it. You've got everything that heart could desire. Why can't you be content, and let other folks be?"

"When we could help them, Bampfylde?" said Geoff. "Is that the way you would be done by? Left to languish abroad; left with a stain on your name, and no one to hold out a hand for you—nobody to try to get you righted; only thinking of their own comfort, and the bit and the sup and the night's rest?"

"You've never done without neither one nor t'other," came in a hoarse undertone from Bampfylde's lips. "It's fine talking; but it's little you know."

"No, I've never had the chance," said Geoff. "I can't tell what it's like, that's true; but if it ever comes my way——"

"Ah, ay! it's fine talking—it's fine talking!"

Geoff did not know how to reply. He went on impatiently,

tossing aloft his young head, as a horse does, excited by his own words like the playing of a trumpet. They proceeded so up a stiff bit of ascent that taxed their strength and their breathing, and made conversation less practicable. The winding mountain road seemed to pierce into the very fastnesses of the hills, and the tall figure of the vagrant a step in advance of him appeared to Geoff like the shadow of some ghostly pioneer working his way into the darkness. No twinkle of a lamp, no outline of any inhabited place looming against the lighter risings of the manifold slopes, encouraged their progress. The hills, which would have made the very brightness of the morning dark, increased the gloom of the night. Only the tinkle of here and there a little stream, the sound of their own footsteps as they passed on, one in advance of the other, the small noises which came so distinctly through the air—here a rustle, there a jar of movement, something stirring under a stone, something moving amid the heather, were to be heard. Bampfylde himself was stilled by these great shadows. His whistle dropped; and the low croon of song which he had raised from time to time did not take its place. He became almost inaudible, as he was almost invisible; only the sound of a measured step and a large confused outline seen at times against the uncertain openings and bits of darkling sky.

When they came abreast again, however, on a comparatively smooth level, after a stiff piece of climbing, he spoke suddenly. "It's queer work going like this through the dark. Many a night I have done it with no company, and then a man's drawn out of himself watching the living things : one will stir at your foot, and one go whirr and strike across your very face, for they put more trust in you in the dark. You see they have the use of their eyesight, and the like of you and me haven't. So they know their advantage. But put a man down beside another man, and a's changed. I cannot understand the meaning of it. It puts things in your head, and it puts away the innocent creatures. Men's seldom innocent : but they're awful strange," said the vagrant, with a sigh.

"Do you think they are so strange ? I am not sure that I do," said Geoff, bewildered a little. "They are just like

everything else—one is dull, one is clever ; but except for that——”

“ Clever ! it’s the creatures that are clever. Did you ever see a bird make a fuss to get you off where her nest was ? A woman wouldn’t have sense to do that. She’d run and shriek, and get hold of her bairns ; but the bird’s clever. That’s what I calls clever. It’s something stranger than that. When a man’s beside you, all’s different ; there’s him thinking and you thinking ; and though you’re close, and I can grip you”—here Bampfylde seized upon Geoff with a sudden, startling grasp, which alarmed the young man—“ I can’t tell no more than Adam where your mind is. Asking your pardon, my young lord, I didn’t mean to startle you,” he added, dropping his hold. “ Now the creatures is all there ; you know where you have ‘em. Far the contrary with a man.”

Geoff was not given to abstract thoughts, and this sudden entry into the regions of the undiscovered perplexed him. “ You like company, then ? ” he said, doubtfully. He knew a great deal more than his companion did of almost everything that could be suggested, but not of this.

“ Like company ? it’s confusing, very confusing. But the creatures is simple. You can watch their ways, and they’re never double-minded. They’re at one thing, one thing at a time. Now, a man, there’s notions in his head, and you can never tell how they got there.”

“ I suppose,” said young Geoff, perplexed yet reverential, “ it is because men are immortal ; not like the beasts that perish.”

“ Ay, ay—I suppose they perish,” said Bampfylde. “ What would they be like us for, and sicken, and pine ? They get the good of it all the time ; run wild as they like, and do mischief as they like, and never put in gaol for it. You think they’re sleeping now? and so they are, and waking too—as still as the stones and as lively as the stars up yonder. That’s them ; but us, if we’re sleeping, it’s for hours long, and dreams with it ; one bit of you lying like a log, t’other bit of you off at the ends of the airth. So, if you’re woke sudden, chances are you aren’t there to be woke—and there’s a business ; but the creatures, they’re always there.”

"That is true," said Geoff, who was slightly overawed, and thought this very fine and poetical—finer than anything he had ever realized before. "But sometimes they are ill, I suppose, and suffer too?"

"Then them that is merciful puts them out of their pain. The hardest-hearted ones will do that. A bird with a broken wing, or a beast with a broken leg, unless it be one of the gentlefolks' pets, that's half mankind, and has to suffer for it because his master's fond of him (and that's funny too)—the worst of folks will put them out of their pain. But a man—we canna' do it," cried the vagrant; "there's law again' it, and more than law. If it was nothing but law, little the likes of me would mind; but there's something written here," he said, putting his hand to his breast; "something that hinders you."

"I hope so indeed," said Geoff, a little breathless, with a sense of horror; "you would not take away a life?"

"But the creatures, ay; they have the best of it. You point your gun at them, or you wring their necks, and it's all over. I'm fond of the creatures—creatures of all kinds. I'm fond of being out with them on a heathery moor like this all myself. They know me, and there's no fear in them. In the morning early, when the air's all blue with the dawn, the stirring and the moving there is, and the scudding about, setting the house in order! A thing not the size of your hand will come out with two bright eyes, and cock its head and look up at you. A cat may look at a king; a bit of a moor chicken, or a rabbit the size o' my thumb, up and faces you, and, 'Who are you, my man?' That is what they looks like; but you never see them like that after it's full day."

"Then is night their happy time?" said Geoff, humouring his strange companion.

"Night, they're free. There's none about that wishes them harm; and though I snare varmint, and sometimes take a hare or a bird,—I'll not deny it, my young lord, though you were to clap me in prison again to-morrow—they're not afraid o' me; they know I'll not harm them. Even the varmint, if they didn't behave bad and hurt the rest, I'd never have the heart. When you go back, if you do go back——"

"I must go back," said Geoff, very gravely. "Why should not I? You don't think I could stay up here?"

"I was not thinking one thing or another. The like of you is contrary. I've little to do with men; but when you go, if you go, it might be early morning, the blue time, at the dawn. Then's the time to see; when there's all the business to be done afore the day, and after the night. Children is curious," said Bampfylde, with a softening of his voice, which felt in the darkness like a slowly dawning smile; "but creatures is more curious yet. I like to watch them. You'll see all the life that's in the moors if it's that time when you go."

"I suppose if there is anything to tell me I cannot go sooner," said Geoff. His tone was grave, and so was his face, though that was invisible. "Then it will be day before I get home, and they will all know—perhaps I was a fool."

"For coming?" said the man, turning round to peer into his face though it was covered by the darkness; and then he gave a low laugh. "I could have told you that!"

For a moment Geoff's blood ran colder; he felt a little thrill of dismay. Was this strange creature a "natural" as he had thought, or did what he said imply danger? But no more was said for a long time. Bampfylde sank back again all at once into the silence he had so suddenly broken, or rather into the low crooning of monotonous old songs with which he had beguiled the first part of the journey. There was a kind of slumbrous soothing in them which half-interested, half-stupefied Geoff. They all went to one tune, a tune not like anything he knew—a kind of low chant, recalling several airs that did not vary from verse to verse, but repeated itself, and so lulled the wayfarer that all active sensation seemed to go from him, and the monotonous, mechanical movement of his limbs seemed to beat time to the croon of sound which accompanied the gradual march. There was something weird in it, something like "the woven paces and the waving hands" of the enchantress. Geoff felt his eyes grow heavy, and his head sinking on his breast, as the low, regular tramp and chant went on.

At length, all at once, the hills seemed to clear away from the sky, opening up on either hand; and straight before them,

hanging low, like a signal of trouble, a late risen and waning moon that seemed thrust forward out into the air, and hanging from the sky, appeared in the luminous but mournful heaven in front of them. There is always something more or less baleful and troublous in this sudden apparition, so late and out of date, of a waning moon ; the oil seems low in the lamp, the light ready to be extinguished, the flame quivering in the socket. Between them and the sky stood a long, low cottage, rambling and extensive, with a rough, grey stone wall built round it, upon which the pale moonlight shone. Long before they reached it, as soon as their steps could be audible, the mingled baying and howling of a dog was heard, rising doleful and ominous in the silence ; and from under the roof—which was half rough thatch and half the coarse tiles used for labourers' cottages—a light strangely red against the radiance of the moon flickered with a livid glare. A strange black silhouette of a house it was, with the low moonlight full upon it, showing here and there in a ghostly full white upon a bit of wall or roof, and contrasting with the red light in the window : it made a mystic sort of conclusion to the journey. Bampfylde directed his steps towards it without a word. He knocked a stroke or two on the door, which seemed to echo over all the country and up to the mountain-tops in their great stillness. “ We are at home, now,” he said.

CHAPTER XX.

THE COTTAGE ON THE FELLS.

THERE was a sound of movement within the house, but no light visible as they stood at the door. Then a window was cautiously opened, and a voice called out into the darkness, “ Is that you, my lad ? ” Geoff felt more and more the little thrill of alarm which was quite instinctive, and meant nothing except excited fancy ; such precautions looked unlike the ordinary ease and freedom of a peasant’s house. A minute after the door was

opened, and 'Lizabeth Bampfylde made her appearance. She had her red handkerchief as usual tied over her white cap, and the flash of this piece of colour and of the old woman's brilliant eyes were the first things which warmed the gloom, the blackness and whiteness and mystic midnight atmosphere. She made an old-fashioned curtsey, with a certain dignity in it, when she saw Geoff, and her face, which had been somewhat eager in expression, paled and saddened instantly. The young man saw her arms come together with a gesture of pain, though the candle she held prevented the natural clasp of the hands. She was not glad to see him, though she had sent for him. This troubled Geoff, whom from his childhood most people had been pleased to see. "You've come, then, my young lord?" she said, with a half-suppressed groan.

"Indeed, I thought you wanted me to come," he said, unreasonably annoyed by this absence of welcome; "you sent for me."

"You thought the lad would be daunted," said Wild Bampfylde, "and I told you he would not be daunted if he had any metal in him. So now you're at the end of all your devices. Come in and welcome, my young lord. I'm glad of it, for one."

Saying this, the vagrant disappeared into the gloom of the interior, where his step was audible moving about, and was presently followed by the striking of a light, which revealed, through an open door, the old-fashioned cottage kitchen, so far in advance of other moorland cottages of the same kind, that it had a little square entrance from the door, which did not open direct into the family living-room. This rude little ante-rooom had even a kind of rude decoration, dimly apparent by the light of 'Lizabeth's candle. A couple of old guns hung on one wall, another boasted a deer's head with fine antlers. Once upon a time it had evidently been prized and cared for. The open door of the room into which Bampfylde had gone showed the ordinary cottage dresser with its gleaming plates (a decoration which in these days has mounted from the kitchen to the drawing-room), deal table, and old-fashioned settle, lighted dimly by a small lamp on the mantelpiece, and the smouldering red of the fire.

'Elizabeth closed the door slowly, and with trembling hands, which trembled still more when Geoff attempted to help her. "No, no ; go in, go in, my young gentleman. Let me be. It's me to serve the like of you, not the like of you to open or shut my door for me. Ah, these are the ways that make you differ from common folk !" she said, as the young man stood back to let her pass. "My son leaves me to do whatever's to be done, and goes in before me, and calls me to serve him ; but the like of you—. It was that, and not his name or his money, that took my Lily's heart."

Geoff followed her into the kitchen. It was low and large, with a small deep-set window at each corner, as is usual in such cottages. Before the fire was spread a large rug of home manufacture, made of scraps of coloured cloth, arranged in an indistinct pattern upon a black background, and Bampfylde was occupying himself busily, putting forward a large high easy-chair in front of the fire, and breaking the "gathered" coals to give at once heat and light. "Sit you down there," he said, thrusting Geoff into it almost with violence, "you're little used to midnight strolling. Me, it's meat and drink to me to be free and aneath the stars. Let her be, let her be. She's not like one of your ladies. Her own way, that's all the like of her can ever get to please them—and she's gotten that," he said, giving another vigorous poke to the fire. Up here among the fells the fire was pleasant, though it was the middle of August : and Geoff's young frame was sufficiently unused to such long trudges to make him glad of the rest. He sat down and looked round him with a grateful sense of the warmth and repose. A north-country cottage was no strange place to young Lord Stanton, and all the tremour of the adventure had passed from him at the sight of the light and the homely, kindly interior. No harm could possibly happen in so familiar an atmosphere, and in such a natural place. Meantime old 'Elizabeth, with a thrill of agitation in her movements which was very apparent, busied herself in laying the table, putting down a clean tablecloth, and placing bread, cheese, and milk upon it. "I have wine, if you like wine better," she said. "He will get it, but he takes none himself—nothing, poor lad, nothing. He's a good son and a

good lad—many a time I've thanked God that He's left me such a lad to be the comfort of my old age."

Wild Bampfylde gave a laugh which was harsh and broken. "You were not always so thankful," he said, producing out of some unseen corner a black bottle; "but the milk is better of its kind, being natural, than the wine."

"Hush, lad; milk is little to the like of him; but *that's* good, for I have it here for—a sick person. Take something, take something, young gentleman. You can trust them that have broken bread in your presence, and sat at your table. Well, if you will have the milk, though it costs but little, it's good too; I would not give my brown cow for ne'er a one in the dales; and eat a bit of the wheaten bread,—it's baker's bread, like what you eat at your own grand house. I would not be so mean as to set you down, a gentleman like you, to what's good and good enough for us. The griddle-cake! no, but you'll not eat that, my young lord, not that; it's o'er homely for the like of you."

"I am not hungry," said Geoff, "and I came here, you know, not to eat and drink, but to hear something you had to tell me, Mrs. Bampfylde—"

"My name is 'Lizabeth—nobody says mistress to me."

"Well; but you have something to tell me. I left home without any explanation, and I wish to get back soon, that they—that my mother," said Geoff, half-ashamed, yet too proud to omit the apparently (he thought) childish excuse, since it was true, "may not be uneasy."

"Your mother? forgive me that did not mind your mother! Oh, you're a good lad; you're worthy a woman's trust that thinks of your mother, and dares to say it! Ay, ay—there's plenty to tell; if I can make up my mind to it—if I can make up my mind!"

"Was not your mind made up then," said Geoff with some impatience, "when in this way, in the night, you sent for me?"

"Oh lad!" cried 'Lizabeth, wringing her hands. "How was I to know you would come, the like of you to the like of me? I put it on Providence that has been often contrary—oh, aye contrary, to mine and me. I shouldn't have tempted God. I said to myself, if he comes it will be the hand of Heaven. But who

was to think you would come ? You a lord, and a fine young gentleman, and me a poor old woman, old as your grandmother. I thought my heart would have sunk to my shoes when I saw he had come after a'!"

"I told you he would come," said Bampfylde, who stood leaning against the mantelpiece. He had taken his bread and cheese from the table, and was eating it where he stood.

"Of course I would come," said Geoff. "I could not suppose you would send for me for nothing. I knew it must be something important. Tell me now, for here I am."

'Elizabeth sat down, dropping into a wooden arm-chair at the end of the table with a kind of despair, and throwing her apron over her head, fell a-crying feebly. "What am I to do? what am I to do?" she said, sobbing. "I have tempted Providence—Oh, but I forgot what was written, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'"

For a minute or two neither of the men spoke, and the sounds of her distress were all that was audible. Once or twice, indeed, Geoff thought he heard a faint sound, like the echo of some low wail or moan, come through the silence. Not the moan itself, but an echo, a ghost of it. But his companions took no notice of this, and he thought he must be mistaken. Everything besides was still. The fire by this time had burned up, and now and then broke into a little flutter of flame; the clock went on ticking with that measured steady movement which 'beats out the little lives of men;' and the broken sobs grew lower. An impatience of the stillness began to take possession of Geoff, but what was he to do ? He restrained himself with an effort.

"You should make a clean breast," said Bampfylde, munching his bread and cheese as he spoke, with his eyes fixed on the fire, not looking at his mother. "Long since it would have been well to do it and an ease to your mind. I would make a clean breast now."

"Oh, lad, a clean breast, a clean breast !" she said, rocking herself. "If it was only me it concerned—if it was only me!"

"If it was only you what would it matter?" said the vagrant, with a philosophy which sounded less harsh to the person addressed than to him who looked on. "You—you're old, and

you'll die, and there would be an end of it ; but them that suffer most have years and years before them, and if you die before you do justice——”

“Then *you* can tell, that have aye wanted to tell !” she cried with a hot outburst of indignation mingled with tears. Then she resumed that monotonous movement, rocking herself again and again, and calmed herself down. It is not so intolerable to a peasant to be told of his or her approaching end as it is to others. She was used to plain speech, and was it not reasonable what he said ? “It's all true, quite true. I'm old, and I cannot bide here for ever to watch him and think of him—and I might make a friend, the Lord grant it, and find one to stand by him——”

“You mean another, a second one,” said her son. He stood through all this side dialogue munching his bread and cheese without once glancing at her even, his shoulders high against the mantelpiece, his eyes cast down.

After a moment's interval 'Elizabeth rose. She came forward moving feebly in her agitation to where Geoff sat. “My young lord, if I tell you *that* that I would rather die than tell—that that breaks my heart ; you'll mind that I am doing it to make amends to the dead and to the living—and—you'll swear to me first to keep it secret ? You'll swear your Bible oath ?—without that, not another word.”

“Swear !” said Geoff, in alarm.

“Just swear—you can do it as well, they tell me, in one place as another, in a private house or a justice court. I hope we have Bibles here—Bibles enough—if we but make a right use of them,” said the old woman, perplexed, mingling the formulas of common life with the necessities of an extraordinary and unrealized emergency. “Here is a Testament, that is what is taken to witness in the very court itself. You'll lay your hand upon it, and you'll kiss the book and swear. Where are you going to, young man ?”

Geoff rose and pushed away the book she had placed before him. He was half indignant, half disappointed. “Swear !” he said, “do you know what I want this information for ? Is it to lock it up in my mind, as you seem to have done ? I want it for use.

I want it to help a man who has been cruelly treated between you. I have no right to stand up for him," said Geoff, his nostrils expanding, his cheeks flushing, "but I feel for him—and do you think I will consent to put my last chance away, and hear your story for no good? No indeed; if I am not to make use of it I will go back again and find out for myself—I don't want to be told."

The old woman, and it may be added her son also, stood and gazed upon the glowing eager countenance of the young man with a mingling of feelings which it would be impossible to describe. Admiration, surprise, and almost incredulity were in them. He had not opposed them hitherto, and it was almost impossible to believe that he would have the courage to oppose them so decidedly; but as he stood confronting them, young, simple, ingenuous, reasonable, they were both convinced of their error. Geoff would yield no more than the hill behind. His very simplicity and easiness made him invulnerable. Wild Bampfylde burst into that sudden broken laugh which is with some the only evidence of emotion. He came forward hastily and patted Geoff's shoulder, "That's right, my lad, that's right," he cried.

"You will not," said old 'Lizabeth; "not swear?—and not hear me?—oh, but you're bold—oh, but you've a stout heart to say that to me in my ain house! Then the Lord's delivered me, and I'll say nothing," she said with a sudden cry of delight.

Her son came up and took her by the arm. "Look here," he said, "it was me that brought him. I did not approve, but I did your bidding, as I've always done your bidding; but I've changed my mind if you've changed yours. Now that he is here, make no more fuss, but tell him; for, remember, I know everything as well as you do, and if you will not, I will. We have come too far to go back now. Tell him; or I will take him where he can see with his own eyes."

"See! what will he see?" cried 'Lizabeth, with a flush of angry colour. "Do you threaten me, lad? He'll see a poor afflicted creature; but that will tell him nothing."

"Mother! are you aye the same? Still *him*, always *him*, whatever happens. What has there been that has not yielded

to him ? the rest of us, your children as well, and justice and honour and right and your own comfort, and the young Squire's life. Oh, it's been a bonnie business from first to last ! And if you will not tell now, then there is no hope that I can see ; and I will do it myself. I am not threatening ; but what must be, must be. Mother, I'll have to do it myself."

When he first addressed her as mother, 'Lizabeth had started with a little cry. What might be the reason that made this mode of expression unusual it was impossible to say ; but it affected the old woman as nothing had yet done. She looked up at him with a wondering, wistful inquiry in her face, as if to ask in what meaning he used the word—kindly or unkindly, taunting or loving ? When he repeated the name she started up as if the sound stung her, and stood for a moment like one driven half out of herself by force of pressure. She looked wildly round her as if looking for some escape, then suddenly seized the lighted candle, which still burned on the table. "Then if it must be, let it be," she said. "Oh, lad ! it's years and years since I've heard that name ! you that would not, and him that could not, and her that was far away ; was there ever a mother as sore punished ?" But it would seem that this expression of feeling exhausted the more generous impulse, for she set down the light on the table again, and dropping into her seat, threw her apron over her head. "No, I canna do it ; I canna do it. Let him die in quiet. It canna be long."

The vagrant watched her with a keen scrutiny quite unlike his usual careless ways. "It's not them as are a burden on the earth that dies," he said. "You've said that long—let him die in peace ; let him die in peace. Am I wishing him harm ? There's ne'er a one will hurt *him*. He's safe enough. Whoever suffers, it will not be *him*."

"Oh, lad, lad !" cried the mother, uncovering her face to look at him. At 'Lizabeth's age there are no floods of tears possible. Her eyes were drawn together and full of moisture—that was all. She looked at him with a passion of reproach and pain. "Did you say suffer ? What's a' the troubles that have been into this house to his affliction ? My son, my son, my miserable lad ! You that can come and go as you like, that have a mind free,

that have your light heart—oh ay, you have a light heart, or how could you waste your days and your nights among beasts and wild things? How can the like of you judge the like of him?"

During this long discussion, to which he had no sort of clue, Geoff stood looking from one to another in a state of perplexity impossible to describe. It could not be John Musgrave they were talking of? Who could it be? Some one who was "afflicted," yet who had been exempt from burdens which had fallen in his stead upon others. Young Lord Stanton, who had come here eager to hear all the story in which he was so much interested, anxious to discover everything, stood, his eyes growing larger, his lips dropping apart in sheer wonder, listening; and feeling all the time that these two peasants spoke a different language from himself, and one to which he had no clue. Just then, however, in the dead silence after 'Lizabeth had spoken, the faint sound like a muffled cry which he had heard before, broke in more loudly. It made Geoff start, who could not guess what it meant, and it roused his companions effectually, who did know. 'Lizabeth wrung her hands; she raised her head in an agony of listening. "He has got one of his ill turns," she said. Bampfylde, too, abandoned his careless attitude by the mantelpiece, and stood up watchful, startled into readiness and preparation as for some emergency. But the cry was not repeated, and gradually the tension relaxed again. "It would be but an ill dream," said 'Lizabeth, pressing a handkerchief to her wet eyes.

Geoff did not know what to do. He was in the midst of some family mystery, which might or might not relate to the other mystery which it was his object to clear up; and this intense atmosphere of anxiety awoke the young man's ready sympathies. All his feelings had changed since he came into the cottage. He who had come a stranger, ready to extract what they could tell by any means, harsh or kind, and who did not know what harshness he might encounter or what danger he might himself run, had passed over entirely to their side. He was as safe as in his own house; he was as deeply interested as he would have been in a personal trouble. His voice faltered as he spoke. "I don't know what it is that distresses you," he said; "I don't

want to pry into your trouble ; but if I can help you you know I will, and I will betray none of your secrets that you trust me with. I will say nothing more than is necessary to clear Musgrave —if Musgrave can be cleared.

“ Musgrave ! Musgrave ! ” cried old 'Lizabeth, impatiently ; “ it's him you all think of, not my boy. And what has he lost, when all's done ? He got his way, and he got my Lily ; never since then have I set eyes on her, and never will. I paid him the price of my Lily for what he did ; and was that nothing ? Musgrave ! Speak no more o' Musgrave to me ! ”

“ Oh, mother,” said her son, with kindred impatience, as he walked towards her and seized her arm in sudden passion ; “ oh, 'Lizabeth Bampfylde ! You do more than murder men, for you kill the pity in them ! What's all you have done compared to what John Musgrave has done ? and me—am I nothing ? Two —three of us ! Lily, too, you've sacrificed Lily ! And is it all to go on to another generation, and the wrong to last ? I think you have a heart of stone—a heart of stone to them and to me ! ”

At this moment there was another louder cry, and mother and son started together with one impulse, forgetting their struggle. 'Lizabeth took up the candle from the table, and Bampfylde hastily went to a cupboard in the corner, from which he took out something. He made an imperative sign to Geoff to follow, as he hurried after his mother. They went through a narrow winding passage lighted only by the flickering of the candle which 'Lizabeth carried, and by what looked like a mass of something white breaking the blackness, but was in reality the moonlight streaming in through a small window. At the end of the passage was a steep stair, almost like a ladder. Already Geoff, hurrying after the mother and son, was prepared by the cries for what the revelation was likely to be ; and he was scarcely surprised when, after careful reconnoitring by an opening in the door, defended by iron bars, they both entered hastily, though with precaution, leaving him outside. Geoff heard the struggle that ensued, the wild cries of the madman, the aggravation of frenzy which followed, when it was evident they had secured him. Neither mother nor son spoke, but went about their work

with the precision of long use. Geoff had not the heart to look in through the opening which Bampfylde had left free. Why should he spy upon them? He could not tell what connection this prison chamber had with the story of John Musgrave, but there could be little doubt of the secret here inclosed. He did not know how long he waited outside, his young frame all thrilling with excitement and painful sympathy. How could he help them? was what the young man thought. It was against the law, he knew, to keep a lunatic thus in a private house, but Geoff thought only of the family, the mysterious burden upon their lives, the long misery of the sufferer. He was overawed, as youth naturally is, by contact with misery so hopeless and so terrible. After a long time Bampfylde came out, his dress torn and disordered, and great drops of moisture hanging on his forehead. "Have you seen him?" he asked in a whisper. He did not understand Geoff's hesitation and delicacy, but with a certain impatience pointed him to the opening in the door, which was so high up that Geoff had to ascend two rough wooden steps placed there for the purpose, to look through. The room within was higher than could have been supposed from the height of the cottage; it was not ceiled, but showed the construction of the roof, and in a rude way it was padded here and there, evidently to prevent the inmate doing himself a mischief. The madman lay upon a mattress on the floor, so confined now that he could only lie there and pant and cry; his mother sat by him, motionless. Though his face was wild and distorted, and his eyes gleaming furiously out of its paleness, this unhappy creature had the same handsome features which distinguished the family. Young Geoff could scarcely restrain a shiver, not of fear, but of nervous excitement, as he looked at this miserable sight. Old 'Elizabeth sat confronting him, unconscious of the hurried look which was all Geoff could give. She was clasping her knees with her hands in one of those forced and rigid attitudes almost painful, which seem to give a kind of ease to pain—and sat with her head raised, and her strained eyes pitifully vacant, in that pause of half-unconsciousness in which all the senses are keen, yet the mind stilled with very excitement. "I cannot spy upon them," said Geoff, in a whisper. "Is it safe to leave her there?"

"Quite safe ; and at his maddest he never harmed her," said Bampfylde, leading the way down-stairs. "That's my brother," he said, with bitterness, when they had reached the living-room again ; "my gentleman brother ! him that was to be our honour and glory. You see what it's come to ; but nothing will win her heart from him. If we should all perish, what of that ? 'Lizabeth Bampfylde will aye have saved her son from shame. But come, come, sit down and eat a bit, my young lord. At your age the like of all this is bad for you."

"For me—what does it matter about me ?" cried Geoff ; "you seem to have borne it for years."

"You may say that : for years—and would for years more, if she had her way ; but a man must eat and drink, if his heart be sore. Take a morsel of something and a drink to give you strength to go home."

"I am very, very sorry for you," said Geoff, "but—you will think it heartless to say so—I have learned nothing. There is some mystery, but I knew as much as that before."

Bampfylde was moving about in the back-ground searching for something. He reappeared as Geoff spoke with a bottle in his hand, and poured out for him a glass of dark-coloured wine. It was port, the wine most trusted in such humble houses. "Take this," he said ; "take it, it's good, it will keep up your strength ; and bide a moment till she comes. She will tell you herself—or if not I will tell you ; but now you've seen all the mysteries of this house, she will have to yield, ~~she~~ will have to yield at the last."

Geoff obeyed, being indeed very much exhausted and shaken by all that had happened. He swallowed the sweet, strong decoction of unknown elements, which Bampfylde called port wine, and believed in as a panacea, and tried to eat a morsel of the oat-cake. They heard the distant moans gradually die out, as the blueness of dawn stole in at the window. Bampfylde, whose tongue seemed to be loosed by this climax of excitement, began to talk ; he told Geoff of the long watch of years which they had kept, how his mother and he relieved each other, and how they had hoped the patient was growing calmer, how he had mended and calmed down, sometimes for long intervals, but

then grown worse again ; and the means they had used to restrain him, and all the details of his state. When the ice was thus broken, it seemed a relief to talk of it. "He was to make all our fortunes," Bampfylde said ; "he was a gentleman—and he was a great scholar. All her pride was in him; and this is what it's come to now."

They had fallen into silence when 'Elizabeth came in. Their excitement had decreased, thanks to the conversation and the natural relief which comes after a crisis, but hers was still at its full height. She came in solemnly, and sat down amongst them, the blue light from the window making a paleness about her as she placed herself in front of it; though the lamp was still burning on the mantelshelf, and the fire kept up a ruddy variety of light. She seated herself in the big wooden arm-chair with a solemn countenance and fixed her eyes upon Geoff, who, moved beyond measure by pity and reverence, did not know what to think.

"He will have told you," she said. "I would have died sooner, my young lord; and soon I'll die—but, my boy first, I pray God. Ay, you've seen him now. That was him that was my pride; that was the hope I had in my life; that was him that killed young Lord Stanton and made John Musgrave an exile and a wanderer. Ay—you know it all now."

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EARLY MEETING

GEOFF left the cottage when the sun had just risen. He was half-giddy, half-stunned by the strange new light, unexpected up to the last moment, which had been thrown upon the whole question which he had undertaken to solve. He was giddy too with fatigue, the night's watch, the long walk, the want of sleep. Besides all these confusing influences there is something in the atmosphere of the very early morning, the active stillness, the absence of human life, the pre-occupation of Nature with a

hundred small (as it were) domestic cares such as she never exhibits to the eye of man, that moves the mind of an unaccustomed observer to a kind of rapture, bewildering in its solemn influence. To come out from the lonely little house folded among the hills, with all its miseries past and present, its sad story, its secret, the atmosphere of human suffering in it, to all the still glory of the summer morning, was of itself a bewilderment. The same world, and only a step between them : but one all pain and darkness, mortal anguish and confusion—the other all so clear, so sweet, so still, solemn with the serious beginning of the new day, and instinct with that great, still pressure of something more than what is seen, some soul of earth and sky which goes deeper than all belief, and which no sceptic of the higher kind, but only the gross and earthly, can disbelieve in. Young Geoff disbelieving nothing, his heart full of the faith and conviction of youth, came out into this wide purity and calm with an expansion of all his being. It was all he could do not to burst into sudden tears when he felt the sudden relief—the dew crept to his eyelids though it did not fall, his bosom contracted and expanded as with a sob. To this world of mountain and cloud — of rising sunshine and soft-breathing air, and serene delicious silence, pervaded by the soft indistinguishable hum of unseen water and rustling grasses, and minute living creatures unseen too beneath the mountain herbage —what is the noblest palace built with hands but a visible limitation and contraction of the world, an appropriation of a petty corner out of which human conceit makes its centre of the earth ? Bampfylde, who had come out with him, and to whom the story Geoff had just heard was not new, felt the relief more simply. He drew a long breath of refreshment and ease, expanding his breast and stretching out his arms; and then this rough vagrant fellow, unconscious of literature, did what Virgil in the *Purgatorio* did in such a morning for his poet companion ; he spread both his hands upon the fragrant grass, all heavy with the early dew, and bathed his face and weary eyes.

“ That’s life,” said the man of woods and hills ; the freshness of nature was all the help he had, all the support as well as all the poetry his maimed existence could possess.

Bampfylde went with his young companion round the shoulder of the hill to show him the way. It was a nearer and shorter road to the level country than that by which they had come, for Geoff was anxious to get home early. Bampfylde pointed out to him the line of road which twisted about and about like a ribbon, crossing now one slope, now another, till it disappeared upon the shadowed side of the green hill which presided over Penninghame, and beyond which the lake gleamed blue, not yet reached by the sunshine.

"It's like the story," he said; "it's like a parable; ye come by Stanton, my young lord, and ye go by Penninghame. It's your nearest way; and there, if you ask at John Armstrong's in the village, ye'll get a trap to take you home."

Geoff was not sufficiently free in mind to be able to give any attention to the parable. Those fantastic symbolisms of accident or circumstance which so often would seem to be arranged like shadows of more important matters by some elfish secondary providence, need a spirit at rest to enter into them. He was glad to be alone, to realise all that he had heard, to compose the wonderful tangle of new information and new thoughts into something coherent, without troubling himself about the fact that he was now bending his steps direct, the representative of Walter Stanton who had been killed, towards the house from which John Musgrave had been wrongfully driven for having killed him. He did not even yet know all the particulars of the story, and as he endeavoured to disentangle them in his mind Geoff felt in his bewilderment that absolute want of control over his own intelligence and thoughts which is the common result of fatigue and overstrain. Instead of thinking out the imbroglio and deciding what was to be done, his mind, like a tired child, kept playing with the rising light which touched every moment a new peak and caught every moment a new reflection in some bit of mountain stream or waterfall, or even in a ditch or moorland cutting, so impartial is Heaven; or his ear was caught by that hum of mystic indistinguishable multitude—"the silence of the hills," so called—the soft rapture of sound in which not one tone is distinct or anything audible; or his eye by the gradual unrolling of the landscape as he went on, one fold

opening beyond another, the distant hills on one hand, the long stretch of Penninghame water with all its miniature bays and curves. Then for a little while he lost the lake by a doubling of the path, which seemed to reinclose him among the hollows of the hills, and which pleased his languid faculties with the complete change of its shade and greenness ; until turning the next corner, he found the sun triumphant over all the landscape, and Penninghame water lying like a sheet of silver or palest gold, dazzling and flashing between its slopes. This wonderful glory so suddenly bursting upon him completed the discomfiture of young Geoff's attempts at thought. He gave it up then, and went on with weary limbs and a mind full of languid soft delight in the air about him and the scene before his eyes, attempting no more deductions from what he had heard or arrangements as to what he should do. Emotion and exertion together had worn him out.

About the time he resigned himself (with the drowsy surprise we feel in dreams) to this incapable state, his eye was caught by a speck upon the road beneath advancing towards him, so small in the distance that Geoff's languid imagination, capable of no more active exercise, began to wonder who the little pilgrim could be, so little and so lonely, and so early astir. Perhaps it was the distance that made the advancing passenger look so small. Little Lilias at the Castle would have satisfied her mind by the easy conclusion that it was some little fairy old woman, the traveller most naturally to be met with at such an hour and place. But Geoff, more artificial, did not think of that. He kept watching the little wayfarer, as the figure appeared and disappeared on the winding road. By and by he made out that it was either a very small woman or a little girl, coming on steadily to meet him, with now and then an occasional pause for breath, for the ascent was steep. Geoff's mind got quite entangled with this little figure. Who could it be ? who could she be ? A little cottager bound on some early expedition, seeking some of the mountain fruits, blackberries, cranberries, wild strawberries, perhaps ; but then she never turned aside to the rougher ground, but kept on the path ;—or she might be going to some farmhouse to get milk for the family breakfast : but then there were no

farmhouses in that direction. Altogether Geoff felt himself quite sufficiently occupied as he came gradually downwards watching this child, his limbs feeling heavy, and his head somewhat light. At last, after losing sight of the little figure which had given him for some time a sort of distant companionship, another turn brought him full in sight of her, and so near that he recognised her with the most curious and startling interest. He could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. It was the little girl whom he had met at the door of Penninghame Castle, John Musgrave's child, the most appropriate, yet the most extraordinary, of all encounters he could have made. He stood still in his surprise, awaiting her: and as for little Lilius, she made a sudden spring towards him, holding out her hand with a cry of joy, her little pale face crimsoned over with relief and pleasure. Her heart and limbs were beginning to fail her; she had begun to grow frightened and discouraged by the loneliness; and to see a face that had been seen before, that had looked friendly, that recognised her—what a relief it was to the little wayfaring soul! She sprang forward to him, and then in the comfort of it fairly broke down, and sobbed and cried, trying to smile all the time, and to tell him that she was glad, and that he must not mind.

Geoff, however, minded very much. He was full of concern and sympathy. He took her hand, and putting his arm round her (for she was still a child), led her to the soft, mossy bank on the edge of the path, and placed her there to rest. He was not at all sorry to place himself beside her, notwithstanding his haste. He, too, was so young and so tired! though for the moment he forgot both his fatigue and his youth, and felt most fatherly, soothing the little girl, and entreating her to take comfort, and not to cry.

"Oh," said little Lilius, when she recovered the power of speech, "I am not crying for trouble, *now*; I am crying for pleasure. It was so lonely. I thought everybody must be dead, and there was no one but only me in all the world."

"That was exactly what I felt too," said Geoff; "but what are you doing here, so far away, and all alone? Have you lost yourself? Has anything happened? When you have rested a little, you must come back with me, and I will take you home."

The tears were still upon the child's cheeks, and two great lucid pools in her eyes, which made their depths of light more unfathomable than ever. And after the sudden flush of excitement and pleasure, Lilias had paled again; her little countenance was strangely white; her dark hair hung, loosely curling, about her cheeks; her eyes were full of pathetic meaning. Geoff, who had thrown himself down beside her, with one arm half round her, and holding her small hand in his, felt his young breast swell with the tenderest sympathy. What was the child's trouble that was so great? Poor little darling! How sweet it was to be able to fill up her world, and prove to her that there was not "only me." One other made all the difference; and Geoff felt this as much as she did. Her face had gleamed so often across his imagination since he saw it: the most innocent visitant that could come and look a young man in the face in the midst of his dreams—only a child! He felt disposed to kiss the little hand in half fondness, half reverence; but did not, being restrained by something more reverent and tender still.

"I would like to go with you," said Lilias, "but not home. I am not going home. I am going up there—up, I don't know how far—where the old woman lives. I am trying to find something out, something about papa. Oh, I wonder if you know! Are you a friend of my papa? You look as if you had a friend's face—but I don't know your name."

"My name—is Geoffrey Stanton—but most people call me Geoff. I should like you to call me Geoff—and I am a friend, little Lily. You are Lily *too*, are you not? I am a sworn friend to your papa."

"Lilias," said the child, with a sigh; "but I don't think I am little any more. I was little when I came, but old; oh! much older than any one thought. They thought I was only ten because I was so little; but I was twelve! and that will soon be a year ago. I have always taken care of Nello as long as I can remember, and that makes one old, you know. And now here is this about papa, which I never knew, which I never heard of, which is not true, I know. I know it is not true. Papa kill any one! *papa?* Do you know what that means? It

is as if——the sky should kill some one, or the beautiful kind light, or a little child. All that, all that, sooner than papa ! Me, I have often felt as if I could kill somebody ; but *he*——” the tears were streaming in a torrent down the child’s cheeks, and got into her voice ; but she went on, “ *he* ! people don’t know what they are saying. I do not know any words to tell you how different *he* is—that it is impossible, *impossible ! impossible !* ” she cried, her voice rising in intensity of emphasis. As for Geoff, he held her hand ever closer, and kept gazing at her with the tears coming to his own eyes.

“ He did not do it,” he said. “ Listen to me, Lilias, and if you write to him, you can tell him. Tell him Geoffrey Stanton knows everything, and will never rest till he is cleared. Do you know what I mean ? You must tell him——”

“ But I never write—we do not know where he is ; but tell me over again for me, *me*. He did not do it ! Do you think I do not know that ? But Mr. Geoff (if that is your name), come with me up to the old woman, and take her to the tribunal, and make her tell what she knows. That is the right way, Martuccia says so, and I have read it in books. She must go to the judge, and she must say it all, and have it written down in a book. It is like that—I am not so ignorant. Come with me to the old woman, Mr. Geoff.”

“ What old woman ? ” he asked. “ And tell me how you heard of all this, Lilias ? You did not know it when I saw you before.”

“ Last night—only last night ; there is a man, an unkind, disagreeable man, who is at the Castle now. Mary said he was my uncle Randolph. They were in the hall, and I heard them talking. That man said it all ; but Mary did not say No as I do, she only cried. And then I rushed and asked Miss Brown what it meant. Miss Brown is Mary’s maid, and she knows everything. She told me about a gentleman, and then of some one who was mamma, and of an old woman who could tell it all, up, up on the mountain. I think, perhaps, it is the same old woman I saw.”

“ Did you see her ? When did you see her, Lily ? ”

“ I was little then,” said Lilias, with mournful,

dignity. "I had not begun to know. I thought, perhaps, it was a fairy. Yes, you will laugh. I was only not much better than a child. And when children are in the woods, don't you know, fairies often come? I was ignorant, that was what I thought. She was very kind. She kissed me, and asked if I would call her granny. Poor old woman! She was very very sorry for something. I think that must be the old woman. She knows everything, Miss Brown says. Mr. Geoff," said Lilius turning round upon him, putting her two clasped hands suddenly upon his shoulder, and fixing her eyes upon his face, "I am going to her, will you not come with me? It is dreadful, dreadful, to go away far alone—everything looks so big and so high, and one only, one is so small; and everything is singing altogether, and it is all so still; and then your heart beats and thumps, and you have no breath, and it is so far, far away. Mr. Geoff, oh! I would love you so much, I would thank you for ever, I would do anything for you, if you would only come with me! I am not really tired; only frightened. If I could have brought Nello, it would have been nothing. I should have had him to take care of,—but Nello is such a little fellow. He does not understand anything; he could not know about papa as I do, and as you seem to do. Mr. Geoff, when was it you saw papa? Oh! will you come up, up yonder, and go to the old woman with me?"

"Dear little Lily," said Geoff, holding her in his arms, "you are not able to walk so far; it is too much for you; you must come with me, home."

"I am able to go to the end of the world," cried Lilius, proudly. "I am not tired. Oh, if you had never come I should have gone on, straight on! I was thinking, perhaps, you would go with me, that made me so stupid. No, never mind, since you do not choose to come. Good-bye, Mr. Geoff. No, I am not angry. Perhaps you are tired yourself:—and then," said Lilius, her voice quivering, "you are not papa's child, and it is not your business. Oh! I am quite able to go on. I am not tired—not at all tired; it was only," she said, vehemently, the tears overpowering her voice, "only because I caught sight of you so suddenly, and I thought 'he will

come with me,' and it made my heart so easy—but never mind, never mind!"

By this time she was struggling to escape from him, to go on drying her tears with a hasty hand. Her lips were quivering, scarcely able to form the words. The disappointment, after that little burst of hope, was almost more than Liliias could bear.

"Lily," he said, holding her fast, despite her struggles, "listen first. I have just been there. I have seen the old woman. There is nothing more for you to do, dear. Won't you listen to me,—won't you believe me? Dear little Lily, I have found out everything. I know everything. I cannot tell it you all, out here on the hill-side; but it was another who did it, and your father was so kind, so good, that he allowed it to be supposed it was he, to save the other man—"

"Ah!" cried Liliias, ceasing to struggle, "ah! yes, that is like him. I know my papa, there! yes, that is what he would do. Oh, Mr. Geoff, dear Mr. Geoff, tell me more, more!"

"As we go home," said Geoff. He was so tired that it was all he could do to raise himself again from the soft cushions of the mossy grass. He held Liliias still by the hand. And in this way the two wearied young creatures went down the rest of the long road together—she, eager, with her face raised to him; he stooping towards her. They leaned against each other in their weariness, walking on irregularly, now slow, now faster, hand in hand. And oh! how much shorter the way seemed to Liliias as she went back. She vowed never, never to tell any one; never to talk of it except to Mr. Geoff: while Geoff, on his part, promised that everything should be set right, that everybody should know her father to be capable of nothing evil, but of everything good; that all should be well with him; that he should come and live at home for ever, and that all good people should be made happy, and all evil ones confounded. The one was scarcely more confident than the other that all this was possible and likely, as the boy and the girl came sweetly down the hill together, tired but happy, with traces of tears about their eyes, but infinite relief in their hearts. The morning, now warm with the full glory of the sun, was sweet beyond all thought—the sky, fathomless blue, above them—the lake a dazzling sheet

of silver at their feet. Here and there sounds began to stir of awakening in the little farmhouses, and under the thatched cottage eaves ; but still they had the earth all to themselves like a younger Adam and Eve—nothing but blue space and distance, sweet sunshine warming and rising, breathing of odours and soft baptism of dew upon the new-created pair.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HENS AND THE DUCKLING.

IT was still early, and Stanton, so easy-going and leisurely a house, was not yet astir when Geoff got home. Hours of sunshine and morning light are over even in August before seven o'clock, which was the earliest hour at which Lady Stanton's servants, who were all "so kind" to her, began to stir. They kept earlier hours at Penninghame, where Geoff managed to get a dog-cart, with an inquisitive driver, who recognised, and would fain have discovered what brought him from home at that hour. The young man, however, first took leave of his little companion, whom he deposited safely at the door of the old hall, which was already open, and where they parted with mutual vows of reliance and faith in each other. These vows, however, were not exchanged by the hall-gate, but in a shady corner of the Chase, where the two young creatures paused for a moment.

" You will trust me that I will do everything for him, as if he had been my own father ? " said Geoff.

Lilias, over whom some doubts had begun to steal, faltered a little, and replied with some hesitation :

" I would rather it was me ; I would rather find out everything, and bring him home," she said.

" But, Lily, what could you do ? while you see I know a great deal already," Geoff said. Now that he was about to vanish out of her sight the bargain began to feel less satisfactory to the little woman, who was thus condemned, as so many grown

women have been, to wait indefinitely for the action of another, in a matter so deeply interesting to herself. Lilias looked at him wistfully, with an anxious curve over her eyebrows, and a quiver in her mouth." The tension of suspense had begun for her, which is one of the hardest burdens of a woman. Oh, if she could but have gone herself, not waiting for any one, to the old woman on the hill! It was true the mountains were very lonely, and the relief of meeting Geoff had been intense; and though she had not gone half way, or nearly so much, her limbs were aching with the unusual distance; but yet to be tired, and lonely, and frightened is nothing, as Lilias felt, to this waiting, which might never come to an end. And already the ease and comfort and sudden relief with which she had leant upon Geoff's understanding and sympathy, had evaporated a little, leaving behind only the strange story about her father, the sudden discovery of trouble and sorrow which had startled her almost into womanhood out of childhood. She looked up into Geoff's face very wistfully — very anxiously; her eyes dilated, and gleaming with that curve over them which once indented in young brows so seldom altogether disappears again.

"Oh, Mr. Geoff!" she said, "but papa — is not your papa: and you will perhaps have other things to do: or—perhaps—you will forget. But me, I shall be always thinking, I shall never forget," said the little girl.

"And neither shall I forget, my little Lily!" he cried. He too was nervous and tremulous with excitement and fatigue. He stooped towards her, holding her hands. "Give me a kiss, Lily, and I will never forget."

The day before she would not have thought much of that infantile salutation—and she put up her soft cheek readily enough, with the child's simple habit; but when the two faces touched, a flood of colour came over both, scorching Lilias, as it seemed, with a sense of shame which bewildered her, which she did not understand. She drew back hastily, with a sudden cry. Sympathy, or some other feeling still more subtle and incomprehensible, made Geoff's young countenance flame too. He looked at her with a tenderness that brought the tears to his eyes.

"You are only a child," he said, hastily, apologetically ; "and I suppose I am not much more, as people say," he added, with a little broken laugh. Then, after a pause—"But, Lily, we will never forget that we have met this morning ; and what one of us does will be for both of us ; and you will always think of me as I shall always think of you. Is it a bargain, Lily ?"

"Always !" said the little girl, very solemnly ; and she gave him her hand again which she had drawn away, and her other cheek ; and this time the kiss got accomplished solemnly, as if it had been a religious ceremony on both sides—which indeed, perhaps, in one way or another it was.

When Geoff felt himself carried rapidly, after this, behind a fresh country horse, with the inquisitive ruddy countenance of Robert Gill from the "Penninghame Arms" by his side, along the margin of Penninghame Water towards his home, there was a thrill and tremor in him which he could not quite account for. By the time he had got half way home, however, he had begun to believe that the tremor meant nothing more than a nervous uncertainty as to how he should get into Stanton, and in what state of abject terror he might find his mother. Even to his own unsophisticated mind, the idea of being out all night had an alarming and disreputable sound ; and probably Lady Stanton had been devoured by all manner of terrors. The perfectly calm aspect of the house, however, comforted Geoff ; no one seemed stirring, except in the lower regions, where the humblest of its inhabitants—the servants' servants—were preparing for their superiors.

Geoff dismissed his dog-cart outside the gates, leaving upon the mind of Robert Gill a very strong certainty that the young lord was "a wild one, like them that went before him," and had been upon "no good gait." "Folks don't stay out all night, and creep into th' house through a side door as quiet as pussy, for good," said the rural sage, with perfect reasonableness.

As for Geoff, he stole up through the shrubberies to reconnoitre the house and see where he could most easily make an entrance, with a half-comic sense of vagabondism ; a man who behaved so ought to be guilty. But he was greatly surprised to see the library window through which he had come out on the

previous night wide open ; and yet more surprised to hear, at the sound of his own cautious footstep on the gravel, a still more cautious movement within, and to descry the kindly countenance of Mr. Tritton, his tutor, with a red nose and red eyes as from want of sleep, looking out with great precaution.

Mr. Tritton's anxious countenance lighted up at the sight of him. He came to the window very softly, but with great eagerness, to admit Geoff, and threw himself upon his pupil. "Where have you been—where have you been ? But thank God you have come back," he cried, in a voice which was broken by agitation.

Geoff could not but laugh, serious as he had been before. Good Mr. Tritton had a dressing-gown thrown over his evening toilet of the previous night ; his white tie was all rumpled and disreputable. He had caught a cold, poor good man, with the open window, and sneezed even as he received his prodigal ; his nose was red, and so were his eyes, which watered, half with cold, half with emotion.

"Oh, my dear Geoff," he cried, with a shiver : "what is the cause of this ? I have spent a most unhappy night. What can be the cause of it ! But thank God you have come back ; and if I can keep it from the knowledge of her ladyship, I will." Then, though he was so tired and so serious, Geoff could not but laugh.

"Have you been sitting up for me ? How good of you ! and what a cold you have got !" he said, struggling between mirth and gratitude. "Have you kept it from my mother ? But I have been doing no harm, master. You need not look at me so anxiously. I have been walking almost all the night, and doing no harm."

"My dear Geoff ? I have been very uneasy, of course. You never did anything of the kind before. Walking all night ? you must be dead tired ; but that is secondary, quite secondary : if you can really assure me, on your honour——" said the anxious tutor, looking at him, with his little white whiskers framing his little red face, more like a good little old woman than ever, and with a look of the most anxious scrutiny in his watery eyes. Mr. Tritton was very virtuous and very particular in his own bachelorly person, and there had crept upon him besides

something of the feminine fervour of anxiety about his charge, which was in the air of this feminine and motherly house.

"On my honour!" said Geoff, meeting his gaze with laughing eyes.

And a pang of relief filled Mr. Tritton's mind. He was almost overcome by it, and could have cried but for his dignity—and, indeed, did cry for his cold. He said, faltering, "Thank Heaven, Geoff! I have been very anxious, my dear boy. Your mother does not know anything about it. I found the window open, and then I found your room vacant. I thought you might have—stepped out—perhaps gone to smoke a cigar. A cigar in the fresh air after dinner is perhaps the least objectionable form of the indulgence, as you have often heard me say. So I waited, especially as I had something to say to you. Then as I found you did not come in, I became anxious—yes, very anxious as the night went on. You never did anything of the kind before; and when the morning came and awoke me—for I suppose I must have dozed, though I was too miserable to sleep, in a draught——"

"Yes, I see, you have caught cold. Go to bed now, master, and so shall I," said Geoff. "I am dead tired. What a sneeze! and all on my account; and you have such bad colds."

"Yes," said Mr. Tritton, blowing his nose vehemently, "I have very bad colds. They last so long. I have sneezed so I really did fear the house would be roused, but servants fortunately sleep through anything. Geoff! I don't want to force confidence, but it really would be right that you should confide in me: otherwise how can I be sure that her ladyship—ought not," said the good man with a fresh sneeze, "to know—?"

"You ought to be in bed, and so ought I," said Geoff. "I will tell my mother, don't fear; but perhaps it will be as well not to say anything more just at present. Master, you must really go this moment and take care of yourself. Come, and I will see you to your room——"

"Ah! it is my part to look after you, Geoff," said good Mr. Tritton. "It might be supposed—her ladyship might think—that I had neglected——"

"Come along," said Geoff, arbitrarily, "to bed." And how

glad he was to stretch out his own young limbs and forget everything in the profound sleep of his age ! Mr. Tritton had very much the worst of it. He did nothing but sneeze for the next two hours, waking himself up every time he went to sleep ; and his head ached, and his eyes watered, and the good man felt thoroughly wretched.

" Oh, there is that poor Mr. Tritton with one of his bad colds again," Lady Stanton said, who was disturbed by the sound ; and, though she was a good woman, the pity in her face was not unmixed by other sentiments. " We shall have nothing but sneezing for the next month," she said to herself in an undertone. And doubtless still less favourable judgments were pronounced down-stairs. A glass was found on the table of the library in which Mr. Tritton, good man, had taken some camphor by way of staving off his cold while he sat and watched. Harris the butler, perversely and unkindly (for who could mistake the smell of camphor ?) declared that " old Tritton had been making a night of it. He don't surprise me with his bad colds," said that functionary ; " look at the colour of his nose !" And indeed it could not be denied that this was red, as the nose of a man subject to fits of sneezing is apt to be.

When Geoff woke in the broad sunshine, and found that it was nearly noon, his first feeling of consternation was soon lost in the strange realization of all that had happened since his last waking, which suddenly came upon his mind like something new, and more real than before. The perspective even of a few hours' sleep makes any new fact or discovery more distinct. So many emotions had followed each other through his mind, that such an interval was necessary to make him feel the real importance of all that he had heard and seen. 'Lizabeth Bampfylde had said what there was to say in few words, but the facts alone were sufficient to make the strange story clear. The chief difficulty was that Geoff had never heard of the elder son, whom the vagrant called his gentleman brother, and to whom the family and more than the family seemed to have been sacrificed. He did not remember any mention of the Bampfyldes except of the mother and daughter who had helped John Musgrave to escape, and one of whom had disappeared with him, and the

mystery which surrounded this other individual, who seemed really the chief actor in the tragedy, had yet to be made out. His mind was full of this as he dressed hastily, with sundry interruptions. The household had not quite made out the events of the past night, but that there had been something "out of the common" was evident to the meanest capacity. The library window had been open all night, which was the fault of Mr. Tritton, who had undertaken to close it, begging Harris to go to bed, and not to mind. Mr. Tritton himself had been seen by an early scullion in his white tie, very much ruffled, at six o'clock; and the volleys of sneezing which had disturbed the house at seven had been distinctly heard moving about like musketry on a march, now at one point, now another, of the corridor and stairs. To crown all these strange commotions was the fact that the young master of the house, instead of obeying Harris's call at half-past seven, did not budge (and then with reluctance) till eleven o'clock. If all these occurrences meant nothing, why then Mr. Harris pronounced himself a Dutchman; and the wonder breathed upwards from the kitchen and housekeeper's room to my lady's chamber, where her maid did all a maid could do (and this is not little, as most heads of a family know) to awaken suspicion. It was suggested to her ladyship that it was very strange that Mr. Tritton should have been walking about the house at six in the morning, waking up my lady with his sneezings—and it was a mercy there had not been a robbery, with the library window "open to the ground," left open all night: and then for my lord to be in bed at eleven was a thing that had never happened before since his lordship had the measles. "I hope he is not sickening for one of these fevers," Lady Stanton's attendant said.

This made Geoff's mother start, and give a suppressed scream of apprehension, and inquire anxiously whether there was any fever about. She had already in her cool drawing-room, over her needlework, felt a vague uneasiness. Geoff had never, since those days of the measles, missed breakfast and prayers before; he had sent her word that he had overslept himself, that he had been sitting up late on the previous night—but altogether it was odd. Lady Stanton, however, subdued her panic, and sat still

and dismissed her maid, waiting with many tremors in her soul till Geoff should come to account for himself. He had been the best boy in the world, and had never given her any anxiety ; but all Lady Stanton's neighbours had predicted the coming of a time when Geoff would "break out," and when the goodness of his earlier days would but increase the riot of the inevitable sowing of wild oats. Lady Stanton had smiled at this, but with a smouldering sense of insecurity in her heart ; alarmed, though she knew there was no cause. Mothers are an order of beings peculiarly constituted, full of certainties and doubts, which moment by moment give each other the lie. Ah, no, Geoff would not "break out," would not "go wrong ;" it was not in him. He was too true, too honourable, too pure—did not she know every thought in his mind, and feeling in his heart ? But oh, the anguish if Geoff should not be so true and so pure—if he should be weak, be tempted and fall, and stain the whiteness which his mother so deeply trusted in, yet so trembled for ! Who can understand such paradoxes ? She would have believed no harm of her boy—and yet in her horror of harm for him the very name of evil gave her a panic. Nothing wonderful in that. She sat and trembled to the very tyings of her shoe, and yet was sure, certain, ready to answer to the whole world for her son, who had done no evil. Other women who have sons know what Lady Stanton felt. She sat nervously still, listening to every sound, till he should come and explain himself. Why was he so late ? What had happened last night to make the house uneasy ? Lady Stanton would not allow herself to think that she was alarmed. It was true that pulses beat in her ears, and her heart mounted to her throat, but she sat still as a statue, and went on with her knitting. "One may not be able to help being foolish, but one can always help showing it," she said to herself.

The sight of Geoff when he appeared, fresh and blooming, made all the throbings subside at once. She even made a fine effort to laugh. "What does this mean, Geoff ? I never knew you so late. The servants have been trying to frighten me, and I hear Mr. Tritton has got a very bad cold," she said, getting the words out hurriedly, afraid lest she might break down or betray

herself. She eyed him very curiously over her knitting, but she made believe not to be looking at him at all.

"Yes; poor old Tritton," he said; "it is my fault; he sat up for me. I went out—" he made a little pause; for Geoff reflected that other people's secrets were not his to confide, even to his mother—"with wild Bampfylde, who came, I suppose, out of gratitude for what little I did for him."

"You went out—with that poacher fellow, Geoff?"

"Yes:" he nodded, meeting her horrified eyes quite calmly and with a smile; "why not, mother? You did not think I should be afraid of him, I hope?"

"Oh how very imprudent, Geoff! You, whose life is of so much value!—who are so very important to me and everybody!"

"Most fellows are important who have mothers to make a fuss," he said, smiling. "I don't think there is much more in me than the rest. But he has not harmed me much, you can see. I have all my limbs as usual; I am none the worse."

"Thank God for that!" said Lady Stanton; "but you must not do the like again. Indeed, indeed, Geoff, you are too bold; you must not put yourself in the way of trouble. Think of your poor brother. Oh, my dear, what an example! You must not be so rash again."

"I will not be rash—in that way," he said. "But, mother, I want you to tell me something. You remember all about it: did you ever know of any more Bampfyldes? There was the mother, and this fellow. Did you ever know of any other?"

"You are missing out the chief one, Geoff—Lily, the girl."

"Yes, yes; I know about her. I did not mean the girl. But think! Were those three all? Were there more—another—?"

Lady Stanton shook her head. "I do not remember any other. I think three were quite enough. There is mischief in one even, of that kind."

"What do you mean by that kind? You did not know them. I hope my mother is not one of the kind who, not knowing people, are unjust to them."

"Geoff!" Lady Stanton was bewildered by this grand tone.

She looked up at him with sudden curiosity, and this curiosity was mixed inevitably with some anxiety too ; for, when your son betrays an unjustifiable partisanship, what so natural as to feel that he must have "some motive" ? "Of course I did not mean to be unjust. But I do not pretend to remember everything that came out on the trial. It was the mother and daughter that interested me. You should ask your cousin Mary ; she recollects better than I do. But have you heard anything about another ? What did the poacher say ? Had you a great deal of conversation with him ? And don't you think it was rash to put yourself in the power of such a lawless sort of fellow ? Thank God ! you are safe and sound."

"What do you mean about putting myself in his power ? Do you think I am not a match for him ? He is not such a giant, mother. Yes, I am quite safe and sound. And we had a great deal of talk. I never met with anybody so interesting. He talked about everything ; chiefly about 'the creatures,' as he calls them."

"What creatures ?" said Lady Stanton, wondering and alarmed. There were "creatures" in the world, this innocent lady knew, about whom a vagabond was very likely to talk, but who could not be mentioned between her and her boy.

"The wild things in the woods, birds and mice, and such small deer, and all their ways, and what they mean, and how to make acquaintance with them. I don't suppose he knows very much out of books," said young Geoff ; "but the bit of dark moor grew quite different with that wild fellow in it—like the hill in the *Lady of the Lake*, when all Clan Alpine got up from behind the rocks and the bushes. Don't you remember, mother ? One could hear 'the creatures' rustling and moving, and multitudes of living things one never gave a thought to. It felt like poetry, too, though I don't know any poem like it. It was very strange and interesting. That pleases me more than your clever people," said Geoff.

"Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon," said Lady Stanton, suddenly getting up and kissing her boy's cheek as she passed him. She went away to hide the penitence in her eyes. As for Geoff, he took this very easily and simply. He thought it

was natural she should apologize to Bampfylde for not thinking well of him. He had not a notion of the shame of evil-thinking thus brought home to her, which scorched Lady Stanton's cheeks.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COUSIN MARY'S OPINION.

GEOFF spent the remainder of this day at home, looking once more over the file of old newspapers in which the Musgrave case was printed at such length, the *Times* and the local papers, with all their little diversities of evidence, one supplementing another; but he could not make out any reference at all distinct to a third person in the story. The two suitors of the village beauty, one of whom she preferred in feeling, though the second of them had evidently made her waver in her allegiance by the attractions of his superior rank and wealth, were enough to fill up the canvas. They were so naturally and appropriately pitted against each other, that neither the curiosity of the period nor the art of the story-teller required any additional actor in the little tragedy. What more natural than that these two rivals should meet—should go from angry words to blows—and that, in the frenzy of the moment, one should give to the other the fatal but unpremeditated stroke which made an end of his rivalry and his life? The public imagination is simple, and loves a simple story, and this was so well-constructed and well-balanced—perfect in all its parts. What more likely than that the humble coquette should hesitate and almost swerve from her faith to her accepted lover when the young lord, so much more splendid than the young squire, came on the scene? or that, when her wavering produced such fatal consequences, the poor girl, not being wicked, but only foolish, should have devoted herself with heroism to the man whom she had been the means of drawing into deadly peril? Geoff, however, with his eyes enlightened,

could dimly perceive the traces of another person unaccounted for, who had appeared casually in the course of the drama. Indeed, the counsel for the prosecution had expressed his regret that he could not call this person as a witness, as he was supposed to have emigrated, and no trace could be found of him. His name, however, was not mentioned, though the counsel for the defence, evidently in complete ignorance, taunted his learned brother with the non-appearance of this mysterious stranger, and defied him to prove, by the production of him, that there had ever been feelings of bitter animosity between Musgrave and Lord Stanton. "The jury would like to know more about this anonymous gentleman," the coroner had said. But no evidence had ever been produced. Geoff searched through the whole case **carefully**, making various notes, and feeling that he himself, anxious as he had been, had never before noticed, except in the most incidental way, these slight, mysterious references. Even now he was misty about it. He was so tired, indeed, that his mind was less clear than usual; and when good Mr. Tritton appeared in the afternoon, very red with perpetual sneezing, his eyes running as with tears, he found Geoff in the library, in a great chair, with all the papers strewed about, sleeping profoundly, the old yellow *Times* in his hand, and the *Dalesman's Gazette* at his feet. The young man jumped up when Mr. Tritton laid his hand on his shoulder, with quite unnecessary energy, almost knocking down his respected instructor. "Take care, take care, Geoff!" he cried; "I am not going to hurt you, my boy!" a speech which amused Geoff greatly, who could have picked Mr. Tritton up and thrown him across his shoulder. This interruption of his studies stopped them for the time; but next morning—not without causing his mother some anxiety—he proposed to ride over once more to Elfdale, to consult Cousin Mary.

"It is but two days since we left, my dear," Lady Stanton said, with a sigh, thinking of all she had heard on the subject of "elderly sirens"; but Geoff showed her so clearly how it **was** that he must refer his difficulties to the person most qualified to solve them, that his mother yielded; though she too began to ask herself why her son should be so much concerned about John Musgrave. What was John Musgrave to Geoff? She did

not feel that it was quite appropriate that the person most interested about poor Walter's slayer should be Walter's successor, he who had most profited by the deed.

Geoff, however, had his way, and went to his cousin Mary with a great deal of caution and anxiety, to hear all that she knew, and carefully to conceal from her what he knew. He found her fortunately by herself, in the languor of the afternoon, even Annie and Fanny having left her for some garden game or other. Lady Stanton the younger was much surprised to see her young cousin, and startled by his sudden appearance. "What is the matter?" she asked, with a woman's ready terror; and was still more surprised that nothing was the matter, and that Geoff was but paying her a simple visit. It may even be suspected that for a moment his mother's alarm communicated itself to Mary. Was it to see *her* the boy had come back so soon and so far? The innocent, kind woman was alarmed. She had known herself a beauty for years, and she knew the common opinion (not in her experience quite corroborated by fact) that for a beautiful face a man will commit any folly. Was she in danger ("at my age!") of becoming a difficulty and a trouble to Geoff? But Geoff soon relieved her mind, making her blush hotly at her own self-conceit and folly.

"I have come to ask you some questions," he said; "you remember the man, the poacher, whom you spoke to me about—the brother, you know?—Bampfylde, whom they call Wild Bampfylde?"

"I know," said Lady Stanton, with a suppressed shiver.

"I met him—the other night—and we got talking. I want you to tell me, Cousin Mary: did you ever hear of—another of them—a brother they had?"

"Ah! that is it," said Lady Stanton, clasping her hands together.

"That is what? Do you know anything about him? I should like to find out; from something they—from something this poacher fellow said—he is not a bad fellow," said Geoff, in an undertone, with a kind of apology in his mind to the vagrant of whom he seemed to be speaking disrespectfully.

"Oh, Geoff, don't have anything to do with them, dear. You

don't know the ways of people like that. Young men think it is fine to show that they are above the prejudices of their class, but it never comes to any good. Poor Walter, if he had never seen her face, might have been—and poor John—”

“But, Cousin Mary, about the brother ?”

“Yes : he was their brother, but we did not find it out for a long time. He was very clever, they said, and a scholar, but ashamed to belong to such poor people. He never went there when he could help it. He took no notice, I believe, of the others. He pretended to be a stranger visiting the Lakes.”

“Cur !” said Geoff.

“Ye—es : it was not—nice ; but it must be a temptation, Geoff, when a man has been brought up so differently. Some relation had given him his education, and he was very clever. I have never felt sure whether it was a happy thing for a boy to be brought so far out of his class. He met John Musgrave somewhere, but John did not know who he was. And just about the time it all happened he went away. I used to think perhaps he might have known something ; but I suppose he thought it would all come out, and his family be known. Fancy being ashamed of your own mother, Geoff ! But it was hard upon him too—an old woman who would tell your fortune—who would stand with her basket in the market, you know : and he, a great scholar, and considered a gentleman. It *was* hard ; I don't excuse him, but I was sorry for him ; and I always thought if he came back again, that he might know—”

Lady Stanton was not accustomed to speak so long and continuously. Her delicate cheeks were stained with red patches ; her breath came quick.

“Do you mean to say he has turned up again—at last ?” she added, with a little gasp

“I have heard of him,” said Geoff. “I wondered—if he could have anything to do with it.”

“I will tell you all about him, Geoff. It was John Musgrave who met with him somewhere. Mary could tell you, too. She was John's only sister, and I her great friend ; and I always took an interest. They met, I think, abroad—and he—was of use to John somehow—I forgot exactly :—that is to say, Mr.

Bampfield (he spelt his name differently from the others) did something for him—in short, John said he saved his life. It was among the Alps, on some precipice, or something of that sort. You see I can only give you my recollection," said Lady Stanton, falteringly conscious of remembering everything about it. "John asked him to Penninghame, but he would not come. He told us this new friend of his knew the country quite well, but no one could get out of him where he had lived. And then he came on a visit to some one else—to the Fieldings, at Langdale—that was the family; and we all knew him. He was very handsome; but who was to suppose that a gentleman visiting in such a house was old 'Elizabeth's son, or—or—that girl's brother? No one thought of such a thing. It was John who found it out at the very last. It was because of something about myself. Oh, Geoff, I was not offended—I was only sorry. Poor fellow! he was wrong, but it was hard upon him. He thought he—took a fancy to me; and poor John was so indignant. No, I assure you not on that account," said Lady Stanton, growing crimson to the eyes, and becoming incoherent. "Never! we were like brother and sister. John never had such a thought in his mind. I always—always took an interest in *him*—but there was never anything of *that* kind."

Young Geoff felt himself blush too, as he listened to this confession. He coloured in sympathy and tender fellow-feeling for her; for it was not hard to read between the lines of Cousin Mary's humble story. John "never had such a thought in his mind;" but she "had always taken an interest." And the blush on her cheek and the water in her eyes told of that interest still.

Then Geoff grew redder still, with another feeling. The madman in the cottage had dared to lift his eyes to this woman so much above him.

"I don't wonder Musgrave was furious," he said.

"That is the right word," she said, with a faint smile; "he was furious; and Walter—your brother—laughed. I did not like that—it was insulting. We were all young people together. Why should not he have cared for—me?—when both of

But we must not think of that—we must not talk

of that, Geoff—we cannot blame your poor brother. He is dead, poor fellow ; and such a death, in the very flower of his youth ! What were a few little silly boyish faults to that ? He died, you know, and all the trouble came. Walter had been very stinging—very insulting, to that poor fellow just the day before, and he could not bear it. He went off that very day, and I have never heard of him again. I don't think people in general even knew who he was. The Fieldings do not to this day. But Walter's foolish joking drove him away. Poor Walter, he had a way of talking—and I suppose he must have found the secret out—or guessed. I have often—often wondered whether Mr. Bampfield knew anything, whether if he had come back he would have said anything about any quarrel between them. I used to pray for him to be found, and then I used to pray that he might not be found ; for I always thought he could throw some light—and after all, what could that light be but of one kind ? ”

“ Did any one ever—suspect—*him* ? ”

“ Geoff ! you frighten me. Him ! whom ? You know who was suspected. I don't think it was intended, Geoff. I know—I know he did not mean it ; but who but one could have done it ? There could not, alas, be any doubt about that.”

“ If Bampfield had been insulted and made angry, as you say, why should not he have been suspected as well as Musgrave ? The one, it seems to me, was just as likely as the other—”

“ Geoff ! you take away my breath ! But he was away ; he left the day before.”

“ Suppose it was found out that he did not go away, Cousin Mary ? Was he more or less likely than Musgrave was to have done a crime ? ”

Lady Stanton looked at him with her eyes wide open, and her lips apart.

“ You do not—mean anything ? You have not—found out anything, Geoff ? ”

“ I—can't tell,” he said. “ I think I have got a clue. If it were found out that Bampfield did not go away—that he was still here, and met poor Walter that fatal morning, what would you say then, you who knew them all ? ”

All the colour ebbed out of Lady Stanton's face. She kept

looking at him with wistful eyes, into which tears had risen, questioning him with an earnestness beyond speech.

"I dare not say the words," she said, faltering; "I don't venture to say the words. But, Geoff, you would not speak like this if you did not mean something. Do you think—really *think*—oh, it is not possible—it is not possible!—it is only a fancy. You can't—suppose—that it matters—much—to me. You are only—speculating. Perhaps it ought not to matter much to me. But oh, Geoff! if—if you knew what that time was in my life. Do you mean anything—do you mean anything, my dear?"

"You have not answered my question," he said. "Which was the most likely to have done a crime?"

Lady Stanton wrung her hands; she could not speak, but kept her eyes upon him in beseeching suspense.

Geoff felt that he had raised a spirit beyond his power to calm again, and he had not intended to commit himself or betray so soon what he had heard.

"Nothing must be known as yet," he said; "but I think I have some reason to speak. Bampfield did not leave the country when you thought he did. He saw poor Walter that morning. If Musgrave saw him at all——"

Lady Stanton gave a little cry—"You mean Walter, Geoff?"

"Yes; if Musgrave saw him at all, it was not till after. And Bampfield was the brother of the girl John was going to marry, and had saved his life."

"My God!" This was no profane exclamation in Mary's mouth. She said it low to herself, clasping her hands together, her face utterly colourless, her eyes wild with wonder and excitement. The shock of this disclosure had driven away the rising tears: and yet Geoff did not mean it as a disclosure. He had trusted in the gentle slowness of her understanding. But there are cases in which feeling supplies all, and more than all, that intellect could give. She said nothing, but sat there silent, with her hands clasped, thinking it over, piecing everything together. No one like Mary had kept hold of every detail; she remembered everything as clearly as if (God forbid!) it had happened yesterday. She put one thing to another which she

remembered but no one else did : and gradually it all became clear to her. Geoff, though he was so much more clever, did not understand the process by which in silence she arranged and perceived every point ; but then Geoff had not the minute acquaintance with the subject nor the feeling which touched every point with interest. By and by Mary began to sob, her gentle breast heaving with emotion. "Oh, Geoff," she cried, "what a heart—what a heart ! He is like our Saviour ; he has given his life for his enemy. Not even his friend ; he was not fond of him ; he did not love him. Who could love him—a man who was ashamed of his own, his very own people ? I—oh, how little and how poor we are ! I might have done it perhaps for my friend ; but he—he is like our Saviour."

"Don't say so. It was not just—it was not right ; he ought not to have done it," cried Geoff. "Think, if it saved something, how much trouble it has made."

"Then it is all true !" she cried, triumphant. In perfect good faith and tender feeling Mary had made her comment upon this strange, sad revelation ; yet she could not but feel all the same the triumph of having thus caught Geoff, and of establishing beyond all doubt that it was true. She fell a-crying in the happiness of the discovery. The moment it was certain, the solemnity of it blew aside, as do the mists before the wind. "Then he will come home again ; he will have his poor little children, and all will be well," she said ; and cried as if her heart would break. It was vain for Geoff to tell her that nothing was as yet proved, that he did not know how to approach the subject ; no difficulties troubled Mary. Her heart was delivered as of a load ; and why should not everything at once be told ? But she wept all the same, and Geoff had no clue to the meaning of her tears. She was glad beyond measure for John Musgrave ; but yet while he was an exile, who had (secretly) stood up for him as she had done ? But when he came home, what would Mary have to do with him ? Nothing ! She would never see him, though she had always taken an interest, and he would never know what interest she had taken. How glad she was ! and yet how the tears poured down !

Geoff had a long ride home. He was half alarmed that he had

allowed so much to be known, but yet he had not revealed 'Lizabeth's secret. Mary had required no particulars, no proof. The suggestion was enough for her. She was not judge or jury—but one to whom the slightest outlet from that dark maze meant full illumination. Geoff could not but speculate a little on the surface of the subject as he rode along through the soft evening, in that unbroken yet active solitude which makes a long ride or walk the most pleasant and sure moment for "thinking over." Geoff's thoughts were quite superficial, as his knowledge was. He wondered if John Musgrave had "taken an interest" in Mary as she had done in him; and how it was that Mary had been his brother's betrothed, yet with so warm a sympathy for his brother's supposed slayer? And how it was that John Musgrave, if he had responded at all to the "interest" she took in him, could have loved and married Lily? All this perplexed Geoff. He did not go any deeper; he did not think of the mingled feelings of the present moment, but only of the tangled web of the past.

It grew dark before he got home. No moon, and a cloudy night disturbed by threatenings or rather promise of rain, which the farmers were anxious for, as they generally are when a short break of fine weather bewilders their operations, in the north. As he turned out of the last cross road, and got upon the straight way to Stanton, he suddenly became aware of some one running by him on the green turf that edged the road and in the shadow of the hedgerow. Geoff was startled by the first sight of this moving shadow running noiselessly by his side. It was a safe country, where there was no danger from thieves, and a "highwayman" was a thing of the last century. But still Geoff shortened his whip in his hand with a certain sense of insecurity. As he did so a voice came from the shadow of the hedge. "It is but me, my young lord." "You!" he cried. He was relieved by the sound, for a close attendant on the road in the dark, when all faces are alike undiscernible, is not pleasant. "What are you doing here, Bampfylde? Are you snaring my birds, or scaring them, or have you come to look after me?"

"Neither the one nor the other," said Wild Bampfylde. "I have other thoughts in my mind than the innocent creatures

that harm no one. My young lord, I cannot tell you what is coming, but something is coming. It's no you, and it's no me, but it's in the air ; and I'm about, whatever happens. If you want me, I'll aye be within call. Not that I'm spying on you ; but whatever happens, I'm here."

"And I want you. I want to ask you something," cried Geoff; but he was slow in putting his next question. It was about his cousin ; and what he wanted was some one who would see, without forcing him to put them into words, the thoughts that arose in his mind. Therefore it was a long time before he spoke again. But in the silence that ensued it soon became evident to Geoff that the figure running along under the shadow of the bushes had disappeared. He stopped his horse, but heard no footfall. "Are you there, Bampfylde ?" but his own voice was all he heard, falling with startling effect into the silence. The vagrant had disappeared, and not a creature was near. Geoff went on with a strange mixture of satisfaction and annoyance. To have this wanderer "about" seemed a kind of aid, and yet to have his movements spied upon did not please the young man. But Bampfylde was no spy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SQUIRE AT HOME.

THE Squire went home after his game of ducks and drakes in the most curious, bewildered state of mind. The shock of all these recent events had affected him much more than any one was aware, and Randolph's visit and desire to make sure about "family arrangements," had filled up the already almost overflowing measure of secret pain. It had momentarily recalled, like a stimulant too sharp and strong, not only his usual power of resistance, but a force of excitement strong enough to overwhelm the faculties which for the time it invigorated ; and while he walked about his woods after his first interview with his son, the Squire was on the edge

of a catastrophe, his brain reeling, his strained powers on the verge of giving way. The encounter with little Nello on the lake-side had exercised a curious arresting power upon the old and worn edifice of the mind which was just then tottering to its fall. It stopped this fall for the moment. The trembling old walls were not perhaps in a less dangerous state, but the wind that had threatened them dropped, and the building stood, shaken to its foundation, and at the mercy of the next blast, but yet so far safe—safe for the moment, and with all the semblance of calm about it. To leave metaphor, the Squire's mind was hushed and lulled by that encounter with the soft peacefulness of childhood, in the most curious, and to himself, inexplicable way. Not, indeed, that he tried to explain. He was as unconscious of what was going on in himself as most of us are. He did not know that the various events which had shaken him had anything more than pain in them—he was unaware of the danger. Even Randolph's appearance and the thought of the discussions which must go on when his back was turned, as to the things that would happen after his death—he was not aware that there was more in them than an injury against which his whole spirit revolted. He did not know that this new annoyance had struck at the very stronghold of vitality, the little strength left to him. Which of us does know when the *coup-de-grâce* is given? He only knew the hurt—the wound—and the forlorn stand he had made against it, and the almost giddy lightness with which he had tried to himself to smile it down, and feel himself superior. Neither did he know what Nello had done for him. His meeting with the child was like the touch of something soft and healing upon a wound. The contact cooled and calmed his entire being. It seemed to put out of his mind all sense of wounding and injury. It did more; it took all distinctness at once from the moral and the physical landmarks round him. The harsher outlines of life grew blurred and dim, and instead of the bitter facts of the past, which he had so long determined to ignore, and the facts of the present which had so pushed themselves upon him, the atmosphere fell all into a soft confusion. A kind of happiness stole over him. What had he to be happy about? yet he was so. Sometimes in our English

summers there is a mist of heat in the air, confusing all the lines of the landscape as much as a fog in winter—in which the hills and lakes and sky are nothing but one dazzle and faint glory of suppressed light and warmth—light confusing but penetrating: warmth perhaps stifling to the young and active, but consolatory to those whose blood runs chill. This was the mental condition in which the Squire was. His troubles seemed to die away, though he had so many of them. Randolph, his middle-aged son, ceased to be an assailant and invader, and dropped into the dark like other troublesome things—not a son to be proud of, but one to put up with easily enough. John? he did not remember much about John; but he remembered very distinctly his old playfellow little Johnny, his little brother. “Eighteen months—only eighteen months between them:” he almost could hear the tone in which his mother said that long ago. If Johnny had lived he would have been—how old would he have been now? Johnny would have been seventy-four or so had he lived—but the Squire did not identify the number of years. There was eighteen months between them, that was all he could remember, and of that he sat and mused, often saying the words over to himself with a soft dreamy smile upon his face. He was often not quite clear that it was not Johnny himself, little Johnny, with whom he had been playing on the water-side.

This change affected him in all things. He had never been so entirely amiable. When Randolph returned to the assault, the Squire would smile and make no reply. He was no longer either irritated or saddened by anything his son might say—indeed he did not take much notice of him one way or another, but would speak of the weather, or take up a book, smiling, when his son began. This was very bewildering to the family. Randolph, who was dull and self-important, was driven half frantic by it, thinking that his father meant to insult him. But the Squire had no purpose of any kind, and Mary, who knew him better, at last grew vaguely alarmed without knowing what she feared. He kept up all his old habits, took his walks as usual, dressed with his ordinary care—but did everything in a vague and hazy way, requiring to be recalled to himself when anything important

happened. When he was in his library, where he had read and written and studied so much, the Squire arranged all his tools as usual, opened his book, even began to write his letters, putting the date—but did no more. Having accomplished that beginning he would lean back in his chair and muse for hours together. It was not thinking even, but only musing; no subject abode with him in these long still hours, and not even any consistent thread of recollections. Shadows of the past came sailing—floating about him, that was all; very often only that soft, wandering thought about little Johnny, occupied all his faculties.—Eighteen months between them, no more! He rarely got beyond that fact, though he never could quite tell whether it was the little brother's face or another—his son's, or his son's son's—which floated through this mist of recollections. He was quite happy in the curious trance which had taken possession of him. He had no active personal feelings, except that of pleasure in the recollection and thought of little Johnny—a thought which pleased and amused, and touched his heart. All anger and harm went out of the old man; he spoke softly when he spoke at all, and suffered himself to be disturbed as he never would have done before. Indeed he was far too gentle and good to be natural. The servants talked of his condition with dismay, yet with that agreeable anticipation of something new which makes even a “death in the house” more or less desirable. “Th' owd Squire's not long for this world,” the Cook and Tom Gardener said to each other. As for Eastwood, he shook his head with mournful importance. “I give you my word, I might drop a trayful of things at his side, and he wouldn't take no notice,” the man said, almost tearfully; “it's clean again nature, that is.” And the other servants shook their heads, and said in their turn that they “didn't like the looks of him,” and that certainly the Squire was not long for this world.

This same event of Randolph's visit had produced other results almost as remarkable. It had turned little Lilius all at once into the slim semblance of a woman, grown-up, and full of thoughts. It is perhaps too much to say that she had grown in outward appearance as suddenly as she had done in mind; but it is no unusual thing in the calmest domestic quiet, were no commotion

is, nor fierce, sudden heat of excitement to quicken a tardy growth, that the elder members of a family should wake up all in a moment, to notice how a child has grown. She had perhaps been springing up gradually ; but now in a moment every one perceived it ; and the moment was coincident with that in which Lilius heard with unspeakable wrath, horror, shame, pity, and indignation, her father's story—that he would be put in prison if he came back ; that he dared not come back ; that he might be—executed. (Lilius would not permit even her thoughts to say hanged—most ignominious of all endings—though Miss Brown had not hesitated to employ the word.) This suggestion had struck into her soul like a fiery arrow. The guilt suggested might have impressed her imagination also ; but the horrible reality of the penalty had gone through and through the child. All the wonderful enterprises she had planned on the moment are past our telling. She would go to the Queen and get his pardon. She would go to the old woman on the hills and find out everything. Ah ! what would she not do ? And then had come the weary pilgrimage which Geoff had intercepted ; and now the ache of pity and terror had yielded to that spell of suspense which, more than anything else, takes the soul out of itself. What had come to the child ? Miss Brown said ; and all the maids and Martuccia watched her without saying anything. Miss Brown, who had been the teller of the story, did not think of identifying it with this result. She said, and all the female household said, that if Miss Lily had been a little older, they knew what they would have thought. And the only woman in the house who took no notice was Mary—herself so full of anxieties that her mind had little leisure for speculation. She said, yes, Lilius had grown ; yes, she was changing. But what time had she to consider Lilius' looks in detail ? Randolph was Mary's special cross ; he was always about, always in her way, making her father uncomfortable, talking at the children. Mary felt herself hustled about from place to place, wearied and worried and kept in perpetual commotion. She could not look into the causes of the Squire's strange looks and ways ; she could not give her attention to the children ; she could scarcely even do her business, into which Randolph would fain have

forced his way, while her all-investigating brother was close by. Would he but go away and leave the harassed household in peace !

But Randolph for his part was not desirous of going away. He could not go away, he represented to himself, without coming to some understanding with his father, though that understanding seemed as far off as ever. So he remained from day to day, acting as a special irritant to the whole household. He had nothing to do, and consequently he roamed about the garden, pointing out to the gardener a great many imperfections in his work ; and about the stables, driving well-nigh out of his wits the steady-going, respectable groom, who nowadays had things very much his own way. He found fault with the wine, making himself obnoxious to Eastwood, and with the made dishes, exasperating Cook. Indeed there was nothing disagreeable which this visitor did not do to set his father's house by the ears. Finally sauntering into the drawing-room, where Mary sat, driven by him out of her favourite hall, where his comments offended her more than she could bear, he reached the climax of all previous exasperations by suddenly urging upon her the undeniable fact that Nello ought to go to school. "The boy," Randolph called him ; nothing would have induced him to employ any pet name to a child, especially a foreign name like Nello—his virtue was of too severe an order to permit any such trifling. He burst out with this advice all at once. "You should send the boy to school ; he ought to be at school. Old Pen's lessons are rubbish. The boy should be at school, Mary," he said. This sudden fulmination disturbed Mary beyond anything that had gone before, for it was quite just and true. "And I know a place—a nice homely, good sort of place, where he would be well taught and well taken care of," he added. "Why should not you get him ready at once ? and I will place him there on my way home." This was, to do him justice, a sudden thought, not premeditated—an idea which had flashed into his mind since he began to speak, but which immediately gained attractiveness to him, when he saw the consternation in Mary's eyes.

"Oh, thank you, Randolph," she said, faintly. Had not Mr.

Pen advised—had not she herself thought of asking her brother's advice, who was himself the father of a boy, and no doubt knew better about education than she did? “But,” she added, faltering, “he could not be got ready in a moment; it would require a little time. I fear that it would not be possible, though it is so very kind.”

“Possible? Oh yes, easily possible, if you give your mind to it,” cried Randolph; and he pointed out to her at great length the advantages of the plan, while Mary sat trembling, in spite of herself, feeling that her horror of the idea was unjustifiable, and that she would probably have no excuse for rejecting so reasonable and apparently kind a proposal. Was it kind? It seemed so on the outside; and how could she venture to impute bad motives to Randolph, when he offered to serve her? She did not know what reply to make; but her mind was thrown into sudden and most unreasonable agitation. She got up at last, agitated and tremulous, and explained that she was compelled to go out to visit some of her poor people. “I have not been in the village since you came,” she said, breathless in her explanations; “and there are several who are ill; and I have something to say to Mr. Pen.”

“Oh, yes, consult old Pen, of course,” Randolph had said. “I would not deprive a lady of her usual spiritual adviser because she happens to be my sister. Of course you must talk it over with Pen.” This assumption of her dependence upon poor Mr. Pen's advice galled Mary, who had by no means elected Mr. Pen to be her spiritual adviser. However, she would not stay to argue the question, but hurried away anxiously with a sense of escape. She had escaped for the moment; yet she had a painful sense in her mind that she could not always escape from Randolph. The proposal was sudden, but it was reasonable and kind—quite kind. It was the thing a good uncle ought to do; no one but would think better of Randolph that he was willing to take so much trouble. Randolph for his part felt that it was very kind; he had no other meaning in the original suggestion; but when he had thus once put it forth, a curious expansion of the idea came into his mind. Little Nello was a terrible bugbear to Randolph. He had long dwelt upon the

thought that it was he who would succeed to Penninghame on his father's death—at first, perhaps, nominally on John's account. But there was very little chance that John would dare the dangers of a trial, and reappear again, to be arraigned for murder, of which crime Randolph had always simply and stolidly believed him guilty; and the younger brother had entertained no doubt that, sooner or later, the unquestioned inheritance would fall into his hands. But this child baffled all his plans. What could be done while he was there? though there was no proof who he was, and none that he was legitimate, or anything but a little impostor: certainly, he was as far from being a lawful and proper English heir—such as an old family like the Musgravs ought to have—such as his own boy would be—as could be supposed. And of course, the best that could be done for himself was to send him to school. It was only of Nello that Randolph thought in this way. The little girl, though a more distinct individual, did not trouble him. She might be legitimate enough—another Mary, to whom, of course, Mary would leave her money—and there would be an end of it. Randolph did not believe, even if there had been no girl of John's, that Mary's money would ever come his way. She would alienate it rather, he felt sure—found a hospital for cats, or something of that description (for Mary was nothing but a typical old maid to Randolph, who regarded her, as an unmarried woman, with much masculine and married contemptuousness), rather than let it come to his side of the family. So let that pass—let the girl pass; but for the boy! That little, small, baby-faced Nello—a little nothing—a creature that might be crushed by a strong hand—a thing unprotected, unacknowledged, without either power or influence, or any one to care for him! how he stood in Randolph's way! But he did not at this moment mean him any harm; that is, no particular harm. The school he had suddenly thought of had nothing wrong in it; it was a school for the sons of farmers or poor clergymen, and people in “reduced circumstances.” It would do Nello a great deal of good. It would clear his mind from any foolish notion of being the heir. And he would be out of the way; and once at school, there is no telling what may happen between the years of ten and twenty. But of one thing

Randolph was quite sure—that he meant no harm, no particular harm, to the boy.

When Mary left him in this hurried way, he strolled out in search of something to amuse or employ the lingering afternoon. Tom Gardener now gave him nothing but sullen answers, and the groom began to dash about pails of water, and make hideous noises as soon as he appeared, so that it did not consist with his dignity to have anything more to say to these functionaries ; so that sheer absence of occupation, mingled with a sudden interest in the boy, on whose behalf he had thus been suddenly “led” to interfere, induced Randolph to look for the children. They were not in their favourite place at the door of the old hall, and he turned his steps instinctively to the side of the water, the natural attraction to everybody at Penninghame. When he came within sight of the little cove where the boats lay, he saw that it was occupied by the little group he sought. He went towards them with some eagerness, though not with any sense of interest or natural beauty such as would have moved most people. Nello was seated on the edge of the rocky step relieved against the blue water ; Lilius placed higher up, with the wind ruffling her brown curls, and the slant sunshine grazing her cheek. The boy had a book open on his knees, but was trying furtive ducks and drakes under cover of the lesson, except when Lilius recalled him to it, when he resumed his learning with much demonstration, saying it over under his breath with visibly moving lips. Lilius had got through her own portion of study. Mr. Pen’s lessons were not long or severe, and she had a girl’s conscientiousness and quickness in learning. Her book was closed on her knee ; her head turned a little towards that road which she watched with a long dreamy gaze, looking for some one—but some one very visionary and far away. Her pensive, abstracted look and pose, and the sudden growth and development which had so suddenly changed Lilius, seemed to have charmed the little girl out of childhood altogether. Was she looking already for the fairy prince, the visionary hero ? And to say the truth, though she was still only a child, this was exactly what Lilius was doing. It was the knight-deliverer, the St. George who kills the dragon, the prince with shoes of swiftness and

invisible coat, brought down to common life, and made familiar by being entitled "Mr. Geoff," for whom, with that kind of visionary childish anticipation which takes no note of possibilities, she was looking. Time and the world are at once vaster, and vaguer, and more narrow at her age than at any other. He might come *now*, suddenly appearing at any moment; and Lilias could not but feel vaguely disappointed every moment that he did not appear. And yet there was no knowing when he would come, to-morrow, next year, she could not tell when. Meanwhile she kept her eyes fixed on the distance, watching for him. But Lilias was not thinking of herself in conjunction with "Mr. Geoff." She was much too young for love; no flutter of even possible sentiment disturbed the serenity of her soul. Nevertheless her mind was concentrated upon the young hero as entirely as the mind of any dreaming maiden could be. He was more than her hero; he was her representative, doing for her the work which perhaps Lilias was not old enough or strong enough to do. So other people, grown-up people, thought at least. And until he came she could do nothing, know nothing. Already, by this means, the child had taken up the burden of her womanhood. Her eyes "were busy in the distance shaping things," that made her heart beat quick. She was waiting already, not for love to come, of which at her age she knew nothing, but for help to come, which she would have given her little life to bestow, but could not, her own hand being too slight and feeble to give help. This thought gave her a pang, while the expectation of help kept her in that woman's purgatory of suspense. Why could not she do it herself? but yet there was a certain sweetness in the expectation which was vague, and had not existed long enough to be tedious. And yet how long, how long it was even since yesterday! From daylight to dusk, even in August, what a world of time. Every one of these slow, big round hours floated by Lilias like clouds when there is no wind, moving imperceptibly; great globes of time never to be done with. Her heart gave a throb whenever any one appeared. But it was Tom Gardener, it was Mr. Pen, it was some one from the village, it was never Mr. Geoff; and finally here was some one quite antagonistic, the enemy in person, the stranger whom

people called Uncle Randolph. Lilius gave her little brother a note of warning ; and she opened her own book again.

When Randolph approached, they had thus the air of being very busily employed, both ;—Lilius intent upon her book, while Nello, furtively feeling in his pocket for the stones which he had stored there for use, busied himself, to all appearance, with his lesson, repeating it to himself with moving lips. Randolph had taken very little notice of the children, except by talking at them to his sister. He came to a pause now, and looked at them with curiosity—or at least he looked at Nello ; for after all, it did not matter about the girl. She might be John's daughter, or she might not ; but in any case she was not worth a thought. He did not see the humour of the preternatural closeness of study which the children exhibited ; but it afforded a means of opening communications.

"Are these your lessons for Mr. Pennithorne ?" he said.

Nello, to whom the question was addressed, made no answer. Was he not much too busy to answer ? his eyes were riveted upon his book. Lilius kept silence too as long as politeness would let her ; but at last the rudeness of it struck her acutely. This might be an enemy, but children ought not to be rude. She therefore said timidly, "Yes ;" and added by way of explanation, "Nello's is Latin ; but me, it is only English I have."

"Is it hard ?" said Randolph, still directing his question to the boy.

Nello gave a glance out of the corner of his eyes at his questioner, but said nothing, only learned harder than ever ; and again it became needful, for the sake of courtesy, that Lilius should answer.

"The Latin is not hard," she said ; "oh, not near so hard as the English. It is so easy to say ; but Mr. Pen does not know how it goes ; he says it all wrong ; he says it like English. I hope Nello will not learn it that way."

Randolph stared at her, but took no further notice. "Can't you speak ?" he said to Nello, "when I ask you a question ? Stop your lesson and listen to me. Shouldn't you like to go to school ?"

Nello looked up with round and astonished eyes, and equally

roundly, with all the force of the monosyllable, said "No," as probably he would have answered to any question.

"No? but you don't know what school is; not lessons only, but a number of fellows to play with, and all kinds of games. You would like it a great deal better than being here, and learning with Mr. Pennithorne."

"No," said Nello again; but his tone was less sure, and he paused to look into his questioner's face. "Would Lily come too?" he said, suddenly accepting the idea. For from No to Yes is not a very long way at eight years old.

"Why, you don't want to drag a girl with you," said Randolph, laughing; "a girl who can't play at anything, wherever you go?"

This argument secured Nello's attention. He said, "N—no," reddening a little, and with a glance at Lilias, against whose sway he dared scarcely rebel all at once; but the sense of superiority even at such an early age is sweet.

"He must not go without me," cried Lilias, roused. "I am to take care of him *always!* Papa said so. Oh, don't listen, Nello, to this—gentleman! You know what I told you—papa is perhaps coming home. Mr. Geoff said—Mr. Geoff knows something that will make everything right again. Mr. Geoff is going to fetch papa——"

"Oh!" cried Nello, reproachfully, "you said I was not to tell; and there you have gone and told yourself!"

"What is that? what is that?" asked Randolph, pricking up his ears.

But the boy and girl looked at each other and were silent. The curious uncle felt that he would most willingly have whipped them both, and that amiable sentiment showed itself in his face.

"And, Lily," said Nello, "I think the old gentleman would not let me go. He will want me to play with; he has never had anybody to play with for—I don't know how long—never since a little boy called little Johnny: and he said that was my name too——"

"Oh, Nello! now it is you who are forgetting; he said (you know you told me) that you were never, never to tell!"

Randolph turned from one to another, bewildered. What

did they mean? Had they the audacity to play upon his fears, the little foundlings, the little impostors! He drew a long breath of fury, and clenched his fist involuntarily. "Children should never have secrets," he said. "Do you know it is wicked, very wicked? You ought to be whipped for it. Tell me directly what you mean!"

But this is not the way to get at any child's secret. The brother and sister looked at each other, and shut fast their mouths. As for Nello, he felt the edges of that stone in his pocket, and thought he would like to throw it at the man. Liliás had no stone, and was not warlike; but she looked at him with the calm of superior knowledge. "It would be dis-honourable," she said, faltering over the pronunciation, but firm in the sentiment, "to tell what we were told not to tell."

"You are going to school with me—on Saturday," said Randolph, with a virulence of irritation which children are just as apt to call forth as their elders. "You will be taught better there; you will not venture to conceal anything, I can tell you, my boy."

And he left them with an angry determination to carry out his plans, and to give over Nello to hands that would tame him effectually, "the best thing for him." The children, though they had secretly enjoyed his discomfiture, were a little appalled by this conclusion. "Oh, Nello, I will tell you what he is—he is the wicked uncle in the *Babes in the Wood*. He will take you and leave you somewhere, where you will lose yourself and starve, and never be heard of. But I will find you. I will go after you. I will never leave you!" cried Liliás with sudden tears.

"I could ask which way to go," said Nello, much impressed, however, by this view. "I can speak English now. I could ask the way home; or something better!—listen, Lily—if he takes me, when we have gone ten miles, or a hundred miles, I will run away!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A NEW VISITOR.

NOTWITHSTANDING her dislike to have it supposed that Mr. Pen was her spiritual adviser, Mary did make a hurried visit to the Vicarage to ask his advice. Not that she had much confidence in the good Vicar's advice ; but to act in such a case, where experience fails you altogether, entirely on your own judgment without even the comfort of "talking it over," is a hard thing to do. "Talking it over" is always an advantage. The for and against of any argument are always clearer when they are put into words and made audible, and thus acquire, as it were, though they may be your own words, a separate existence. Thus Mary became her own adviser when she consulted Mr. Pen, and there was no one else at hand who could fulfil this office. They talked it over anxiously, Mr. Pen being, as she knew he would be, entirely on Randolph's side. To him it appeared that it would be a great advantage for Nello to be taken to school by his uncle. It would be "the right thing to do"—better than if Mary did it—better than Mr. Pen himself could do it. Mary could not find any arguments to meet this conventional certainty. She restrained her distrust and fear, but she could not say anything against the fact that it was kind of Randolph to propose this, and that it would be injurious and unkind on her part to reject it. She went home dispirited and cast down, but set to work at once with the practical preparations. Saturday was the day on which Randolph had said he must go—and it was already Thursday—and there was not a moment to lose. But it was not till the Friday afternoon, the eve of separation, that Miss Musgrave could screw her courage to the point of informing the children what lay before them. The afternoon was half over, and the sun beginning to send long rays aslant from the west. She came in from the village, where she had gone in mere restlessness, feeling that this communication could be delayed no longer ; but she disliked it so much herself that

the thought of Nello's consternation and the tears of Lilius was almost more than their tender guardian could bear.

But when she came in sight of the old hall door, a group encountered her which bewildered Mary. A young man on horseback had drawn up at the side of the ascent, and with his hat off, and the sun shining upon his curling hair and smiling countenance, was looking up and talking to little Lilius, who leaned over the low wall, like a lady of romance looking over her battlements. The sun gleamed full upon Lilius too, lighting up her dark eyes and warmly-tinted cheek and the hair which hung about her shoulders, and making a pretty picture. Her face was full of earnest meaning, grave and eager and tremulous. Nello, at the hall door, above this strange pair, contemplated them with a mixture of jealousy and wonder. Mary had come upon them so suddenly that she could hear the young man answering something to the eager demands of the little girl. "But, you are sure, quite sure? Oh, are you certain, Mr. Geoff?"

"Quite sure," he was saying. "But you must think of me all the time, Lily; you must think of nothing but me—promise me that, and I shall not be afraid."

"I promise!" cried Lilius, clasping her hands. Mary stood and listened altogether confounded, and Nello, from above, bewildered and only half satisfied, looked on. Who was the young man? It seemed to Miss Musgrave that she had seen him before. And what was it that had changed Lilius into this little princess, this small heroine? The heroic aspect, however, gave way before Mary could interfere, and the child murmured something softer, something less unlike the little girl with all whose ways Mary was familiar.

"But I always think of you," she said; "always! since *that day*."

"Do you, indeed, my little Lily? That makes me happy. You must always keep up so good a custom."

And the young man smiled, with eyes full of tenderness, and took the child's hand and held it in his own. Lilius was too young for any comment or false interpretation, but what did it mean? The spectator behind, besides, was too much astonished to move.

"Good-bye, my Lily ; good-bye, Nello," cried the young man, nodding his head to the children. And then he put on his hat and rode round the corner towards the door.

Lilias stood looking after him, like a little saint in an ecstasy. She clasped her hands again, and looked up to the sky, her lips moving, and tears glittering in her eyes.

"Oh, Nello, don't you think God will help him ?" she said, one tear overbrimming suddenly, and rolling down her cheek. She started when Mary, with tones a little sharpened by consternation, called her. Lilias had no sense of shame in her innocent mind, but as there is no telling in what light those curious beings called grown-up people might regard a child's actions, a little thrill of alarm went through her. What might Mary say ? What would she think when she knew that Mr. Geoff "had come to set everything right about papa" ? Lilias felt instinctively that Geoff's mission would not appear in exactly the same light to Mary as it did to herself. She turned round with a sudden flush of surprise and agitation on her face. It looked like the blush of a maturer sentiment to Mary.

"At twelve years old !" she said to herself ! And unconsciously there glanced through her mind a recollection of the first Lily—the child's mother—she who had been the beginning of all the trouble. Was it in the blood ?

"Who is that gentleman ?" Mary asked, with much disturbance of mind. "Lilias ! I could not have expected this of you."

Lilias followed into the hall, very still and pale, feeling herself a culprit, though she did not know why. Her hands dropped straight by her side, after the manner of a creature accused ; and she looked up to Mary with eyes full of vague alarm, into which the tears were ready to come at a moment's notice.

"I have not done anything wrong ?" she said, turning her assertion into a faltering question. "It was Mr. Geoff."

"Mr. Geoff !—who is Mr. Geoff ?"

"He is—very kind—oh, very kind, Mary ; he is—some one who knows about papa : he is—the gentleman who once came with two beautiful horses in a carriage (oh, don't you remember, Nello ?) to see you."

"Yes," said Nello, with ready testimony; "he said I should ride upon them. They were two bay horses, in one of those high-up funny carriages, not like Mary's carriage. I wonder if I might ride upon his horse now?"

"To see *me*?" Mary was entirely bewildered. "And what do you mean about your father?" she said. "Knows about papa! Lilius! come here; I am not angry. What does he know about papa?"

Lilius came up slowly to her side, half unwilling to communicate her own knowledge on this point. For Mary had not told her the secret, she remembered suddenly. But the confusion of Lilius was interrupted by something more startling and agitating. Eastwood came into the hall, with a certain importance and solemnity. "If you please, ma'am," he said, "my Lord Stanton has just come in, and I've shown him into the library—to my master. I thought you would like to know."

"Lord Stanton—to my father, Eastwood? my father ought not to be troubled with strangers. Lord Stanton!—to be sure it was that boy. Quick, say that I shall be glad to see him upstairs."

"If you please, ma'am, his lordship asked for my master; and my master—he said, 'Yes, certainly.' He was quite smiling like, and cheerful. He said, 'Yes; certainly, Eastwood.' So, what was I to do? I showed his lordship in—and there they are now—as friendly—as friendly, if I may venture to make a comparison: His lordship," said Eastwood, prudently pausing before he committed himself to metaphor, "is, if I may make bold to say so, one of the nicest young gentleman!"

Mary had risen hastily to interrupt this dangerous interview, which alarmed her. She stood, paying no attention to Eastwood while the man was talking, feeling herself crowded and pressed on all hands by a multitude of thoughts. The hum of them was in her ears, like the sound of a throng of people. Should she go to the library, whatever her father might think of the interruption? Should she stop this meeting at all hazards? or should she let it go on, and that come which would? All was confusion around her, her heart beating loudly in her ears, and a hundred suggestions sounding through that stormy throbbing. But when

Eastwood's commonplace voice, to which she had been paying no heed, stopped, Mary's thoughts came to a stop also. She grew faint, and the light seemed to vanish from her eyes.

The Squire had been sitting alone all day. He had seemed to all the servants (the most accurate of observers in such a case) more feeble than usual. His daughter, agitated and full of trouble about other things, had not remarked any change. But Eastwood had shaken his head down-stairs, and had said that he did not like the looks of master. He had never been so gentle before. Whatever you said to him he smiled, which was not at all the Squire's way. And though he had a book before him, Eastwood had remarked that he did not read. He would cast his eyes upon his book when any one went in, but it was always the same page. Eastwood had made a great many pretences of business, in order to see how his master was—pretences which the Squire in his usual health would have put a stop to summarily, but which to-day he either did not observe at all, or received smilingly. In this way Eastwood had remarked a great many things which filled him with dismay ; for he liked his old master, and the place suited him to perfection. He noticed the helpless sort of way in which Mr. Musgrave sat ; his knees feebly leaning against each other, his fingers falling in a heap upon the arm of his chair, his eyelids half covering his eyes. It was half the instinct of obedience, and half a benevolent desire to rouse his master, which made Eastwood introduce the visitor into the library without consulting Miss Musgrave. Judging by his own feelings, the man felt that nothing was so likely to stimulate and rouse up the Squire as a visit from a lord. There were not too many of them about ; visitors of any kind, indeed, were not over plentiful at Penninghame ; and a nice, cheerful, affable young lordship was a thing to do anybody good.

And Geoff went in, full of the mission he had taken in hand. It was a bold thing to do, after all he had heard of the inexorable old Squire who had shut his heart to his son, and would hear nothing of him, as everybody said. But it seemed to Geoff, in the rash generosity of his youth, that if he, who was the representative of the injured family, were to interfere, the other

must be convinced—must yield, at least, to reason, and consent to consider the subject. But he did not expect a very warm reception, and went in with a beating heart.

Mr. Musgrave had risen up to receive him ; he had not failed in any of his faculties. He could still hear as well as he did twenty years before, and Lord Stanton's name was unusual enough to call his attention for the moment. He had raised himself from his chair, and stood leaning forward, supporting himself with both hands upon the writing-table before him. This had been a favourite attitude, when he had no occasion for support ; but now the feeble hands leaned heavily with all the weight of his frame upon them. He said the name that had been announced to him with a wavering of suspicion in his tone, "Lord Stanton !" then pointed with a tremulous sweep of his hand to a seat, and himself dropped back into his chair. He was not the stern old chief whom Geoff expected to find in arms against every suggestion of mercy, but a feeble old man, smiling faintly, with a kind of veiled intelligence in his eyes. He murmured something about "an unusual pleasure," which Geoff could not make out.

"I have come to you, sir, about important business. I hope you will not think I am taking too much upon myself. I thought, as I was—the chief person on one side, and you on the other, that you might allow me to speak ?"

Geoff was as nervous as a child ; his colour went and came. It awed him, he could scarcely tell why, to see the feebleness of the old figure, the dreary, abstracted look in the old face.

"Surely—surely," said the old man. "Why should you not speak to me ? Our family is perhaps better known ; but yours, Mr.—I mean, my Lord Stanton, yours is—"

He half forgot what he was saying, getting slower and slower, and now stopped all at once. Then, after a moment, rousing himself, resumed, with a wave of his hand, "Surely—you must say—what you have to say."

This was worse for Geoff than if he had forbidden him altogether. What could he do to rouse interest in the old man's breast ?

"I want to speak, sir," he said, faltering, "of your son."

"My son?—ah! yes, Randolph is here. He is too old for me—too old—not like a son. What does it matter who is your father when it comes to that age?"

"It was not Randolph, sir. I did not know him; but it is your other son—your eldest son, I mean—John."

"Eh?" The old man roused up a little. "John—that was my little brother; we called him Johnny—a delightful boy. There is just such another in the house now, I believe. I think he is in the house."

"Oh, sir!" said Geoff, "I want to speak to you—to plead with you for some one who is not in the house—for your son John—John who has been so long away. You know—don't you know whom I mean?—your eldest son, Mr. Musgrave—*John*, who left us and left everything so many years ago."

A wavering light came over the old man's face. He opened his eyes wide and gazed at Geoff, who, for his part, was too much troubled and alarmed to know what to do.

"Eh!" he said again, with a curious blank stare, "my—what? Son? but not Randolph. No more about sons, they are a trouble and a sorrow. To tell the truth I am drowsy rather. I suppose—I have not been very well. Have you seen the little boy?"

"The little boy?—your grandson, sir?

"Eh! you call him that! He is just such another as little Johnny, my little brother, who was eighteen months younger than I. You were saying something else, my—my—friend! But to tell the truth, this is all I am good for now. The elders would like to push us from the scene; but the little ones," said the Squire, with a curious sudden break of laughter, which sounded full of tears, "the little ones—are fond of old people; that is all I am good for nowadays—to play with the little boy——"

"Oh, sir!" said Geoff in his eagerness, "it is something very different that is expected of you. To save the little boy's father—your son—to bring him back with honour. It is honour, not shame, that he deserves. I who am a stranger, who am the brother of the man who was killed, I have come to entreat you to do John Musgrave justice. You know how he has been

treated. You know, to our disgrace, not his, that there is still a sentence against him. It is John Musgrave—John Musgrave we ought to think of. Listen to me—oh, listen to me ! Your son—”

The old man rose to his feet, and stood wavering, gazing with troubled wide-open eyes, full of the dismal perplexity of an intelligence which feels itself giving way. “John Musgrave !” he said, with pale lips which trembled and dropped apart ; and a thrill and trembling came over his whole frame. Geoff sprang up and came towards him in alarm to support him, but the Squire waved him away with both his tremulous hands, and gave a bewildered look round him as if for some other prop. Suddenly he caught sight of the little carved oak cupboard against the wall. “Ah !” he said, with an exclamation of relief. This was what he wanted. He turned and made a feeble step towards it, opened it, and took from it the cordial which he used in great emergencies, and to which he turned vaguely in this utter overthrowal of all his forces now. But then ensued a piteous spectacle ; all his strength was not sufficient to pour it out. He made one or two despairing efforts, then put the bottle and glass down upon the table with a low cry, and sank back into his chair. He looked at Geoff with the very anguish of feebleness in his eyes. “Ah !” he faltered, “it is true—they are right. I am old—old—and good for nothing. Let them push me away, and take my place.” A few sobs, bitter and terrible, came with the words, and two or three tears dropped down the old man’s grey-pale cheeks. The depth of mortal humiliation was in this last cry.

Geoff almost wept too in the profound pity of his generous young soul—it went to his very heart. “Let me help you,” he cried, pouring out the cordial with anxious care. It was all the Squire could do to put it to his lips. He laid one of his trembling hands upon Geoff’s shoulder as he gave back the glass, and whispered to him hoarsely, “Not Randolph,” he said ; “don’t let Randolph come. Bring me—do you know ?—the little boy.”

“Yes, sir, yes,” cried Geoff ; “I understand.”

The old Squire still held him with a hand which was heavy

as lead upon his arm, "God bless you, my lad," he said. He did not know who Geoff was; but trusted to him as in utter prostration we trust to any hand held out to us. And a little temporary ease came with the potion. He smiled feebly once more, laid back his head, and closed his eyes. "My little Johniny!" he said; and his hands fell as Eastwood had described them, the fingers crumbled together all in a heap, upon the arms of his chair.

Geoff rushed out of the room with a beating heart, feeling himself all at once thrust into a position of importance in this unknown house. He had never seen death or its approach, and in his inexperience did not know how difficult it was to shuffle off the coils of mortality. He thought the old man was dying. Accordingly, he rushed up the slope to the old hall like a whirlwind, where Mary and the children were. "Come, come," he cried; "he is ill, very ill!" and snatching Nello's reluctant hand, ran back, dragging the child with him, who resisted with all his might. "Come, your grandfather wants you," cried Geoff. Mary followed, alarmed, and wondering, and—scarcely knowing where she went in her agitation—found herself, behind the young man and the boy, at the door of that sacred library which the children had never entered, and where their very existence was ignored. Her father was lying back in his great chair; Eastwood, whom Geoff had hastily summoned, standing behind. The old man's heavy eyes were watching the door, his old limbs huddled together in the chair, like something inanimate thrown down in a heap, and lying as it fell. At sight of this awful figure, little Nello gave a loud cry of childish terror, and turning round, would have fled but for Geoff, who stood behind him. At the sound of the child's voice, the old man roused himself feebly; he moved his arms—extending them in intention at least—and his lips with inaudible words. "Go to him, go to him!" cried Geoff in an imperative whisper. Little Nello was not without courage, though he was afraid. Finding the way of escape blocked up, he turned round again, stood irresolute for a moment, and then advanced with the strength of desperation. The old man, with a last effort, put out his arms, and drew the child between his knees. "My

little Johnny!" he said, with an only half-articulate outbreak of crying and strange laughter. Then his arms fell powerless; his head drooped on his breast. Nello broke out wildly into crying; but stood fascinated between the feeble knees.

Was he dead? Geoff thought so in his simplicity as he led the child away, and left Mary and the servants, whom he had summoned, in this death-chamber. He led Nello back to the hall, and sat down beside the children and talked to them in low tones. His mind was full of awe and solemn feeling; his own youth, and strength, and happiness seeming a kind of insult to the old and dying. He went back after a while very grave and humble, to ask how it was, and what he could do. But the Squire was not dead. He was stricken by that *avant-courier* of the great king, who kills the mind before the body dies. It was "a stroke," Eastwood said, in all the awe, yet importance, of so tragic an event. He had seen it coming for weeks before, he said.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN SUSPENSE.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE was extremely annoyed at the turn things had taken. On the day of his father's seizure indeed a kind of serene solemnity came over him. He would not have been so indiscreet or indecorous as to admit that he was glad of the "stroke" which might terminate the Squire's life; such an evil sentiment was far from him. Still if his dear father was indeed in the providence of God to be taken away from this mortal scene, there was a sad satisfaction in having it happen while he was still at the Castle and ready to be of use. As the only male member of the family, it was indeed very important that he should be there on such a melancholy occasion. Mary would have enough on her hands with the nursing and the strictly feminine duties, and he was the only one to turn to, the only one who could do anything. He telegraphed to his wife what the sad occasion was

that detained him, and went to bed with a comfortable sense that his visit had not been in vain. It was melancholy to think that all might be over before the morning; but yet he could do no good by staying up and wearing himself out. If it should so happen that his own sad prognostications were correct, why then he had occasion for all his strength, for he it would be who must do everything. And no martyr could have contemplated the stake with more elevated resignation and satisfaction than Randolph looked at the labours and troubles he would have to take upon him. He lay down, solemnly going over them in his mind—the details of the funeral, the reading of the will, the taking possession of the estate. He resolved that he would take possession in his brother's name. No one knew where John was; he could not be called at a moment's notice like respectable men. Nor, indeed, would it be kind to think of such a thing as bringing him here to the endangerment of his life. No, he would take possession for his brother. He would put his brother's little son to school. The girl of course would go with Mary, who for her part must, he supposed, have the house on the way to Pennington, which was called the Dower-house, though he did not think an unmarried sister had any real right to a place which was intended for the widow of the previous Squire. But that might pass: Mary had been accustomed to have everything her own way, and she should have the Dower-house by grace at least, if not by right. He fell asleep as he was arranging all these things with a great deal of serious satisfaction. Of course it was sad: what is there in this vale of tears that is not mixed with sadness? But it was not (he said to himself) as if his father were a young man, or carried off in the midst of his work. He was old, he had lived out the life of man, he had arrived at the time when a man has a right to expect that his day is over, and must know that in the course of nature he ought to give place to his successors. And as things were to take such a serious turn, how well it was that he, Randolph, should be on the spot to do everything! His satisfaction in this was really the foremost feeling in his mind.

But all was not over in the morning, as Randolph had so certainly anticipated. He got up in the same solemnized but

resigned and serene condition, and wondered a little to see how late it was. For indeed the turn things had taken, though so serious, had been peace-inspiring, removing anxiety from his mind, and he had slept later than usual in consequence. And it was clear that as yet there had been "no change." Eastwood, who was late too, having stayed up late on the previous night indulging the solemn excitement which was natural to this crisis, came in with profound seriousness and an air as solemn as Randolph's. "Just the same, sir," he said; "the doctor is with him now." Randolph could not help a slight sensation of disappointment. He had made up his mind so distinctly what was to happen, and there are cases in which even good news are out of place. It was with less resignation and more anxiety that he hurried out to hear what the doctor said.

And he was much provoked and annoyed when a week later there was still no progress made, and it became apparent that no such easy solution of all difficulties as he had expected was to be looked for. The Squire was in much the same state on the next Saturday and the next, and it was apparent that the illness was to be a lingering and tedious one—the kind of thing which wears out everybody round. When people are going to die, what a pity that they should not do it speedily, relieving both themselves and others! But nature, so often acting in a manner contrary to all prognostications, was not to be hurried. To jog her gently on, and relieve the sufferer authoritatively from his troubles, is not yet permissible in England. On the contrary, medical science acts just the other way, with questionable mercy, prolonging lives in which there is nothing but suffering, and stimulating the worn-out machinery of the frame to go on a little longer, to suffer a little more, with all that wheezing and creaking of the rusty wheels which bears witness to the unnaturalness of the process. This was what Randolph felt with much restrained warmth of annoyance. It was unnatural; it was almost impious. Two doctors, a professional nurse, and Mary, who was as good, all labouring by every possible invention to keep mere life in their patient. Was it right to do so? Providence had evidently willed to release the old man, but science was forcing him to remain imprisoned in the flesh. It was very hard upon the

Squire, and upon Randolph too, especially as the latter could not venture to express his real sentiments on this matter, but was compelled to be glad of every little sign of tenacity and vitality which the patient gave. If it had been recovery indeed, he said to himself, there might have been some reason for satisfaction ; but as it was only holding by life, mere existing and nothing more, what ground was there for thankfulness ? It would be better for the sufferer himself, better for everybody, that it should be over soon. After this state of things had lasted for a fortnight, Randolph could not bear it any longer. He sent for Mary from the sick room, and gave her to understand that he must go.

"Had I expected he would last so long," he said, "I should have gone last week. Of course it does not matter for you who have nothing else to do ; but my work and my time are of importance. If anything were likely to happen directly, of course I should think it my duty to stay ; but, so far as I can see, nothing is likely to happen," said Randolph in an aggrieved tone. Mary was too sad to laugh and too languid to be angry, but there came a gleam of mingled resentment and amusement into her eyes.

"It is not for us to wish that anything should happen," she said.

"Wish ? Did I talk of wishing ? I stated a fact. And in the meantime my parish is being neglected and my work waiting for me. I cannot hang on here for ever. Of course," Randolph added, "if anything should happen, you have only to telegraph, and I will come."

"I don't see that it is necessary, Randolph. My father may rally, or he may linger for months, the doctors say ; and whatever happens—of course you shall hear immediately ; but so far as I am concerned, it does not seem necessary to disturb your work and unsettle your parish——"

"That is ridiculous ; of course I shall come the moment I am summoned. It is quite essential that there should be some man to manage matters. And the boy is all ready," he added ; "you had his outfit prepared before my father's attack came on. Let them pack up for him, and on Friday we shall go."

"The boy! How could I send him away now, when my father might recover his consciousness, and want him?"

"My father want him? This is too much," said Randolph—"my father, from whom you concealed his very existence—who never cared for children at any time. My *father*? What could he possibly want with the boy? He should have gone a fortnight ago. I wrote to enter his name of course, and the money is running on. I can't afford to pay for nothing whatever you may do, Mary. Let his things be packed up, and let him go with me."

"I think your brother is right," said the Vicar, who was present. "Nello is doing no good with me. We have been so much disturbed with all that has taken place; and Emily has been so poorly—you know how poorly she has been—and one feels with one's own children the time can always be made up somehow. That is the worst of lessons at home," said Mr. Pen, with a sigh.

"But my father sent for him—wanted him; how can I send the child away! Mr. Pen, you know, if Randolph does not, that he is the heir, and his grandfather has a right to have him close at hand."

"It is no use arguing with women," said Randolph, white with rage. "I don't understand this nonsense about my father wanting him. I don't believe a word of it. But I tell you this, Mary, if he is the heir, I am his uncle, his next friend; and I say, he sha'n't lose his time here and get ruined among a pack of women. He must go to school. Supposing even that my father did want him (which is absolute absurdity; why, my father pretends not to know of his existence!) would you put a selfish old man's fancy against the boy's good?"

"Randolph! how do you dare, when he is so ill," cried Mary, with trembling lips, "to speak of my father so!"

"It is true enough anyhow," said the undutiful son. "When he is so ill! Why, that is the reason I can speak freely. One would not hurt his feelings if he could ever know it. But he was always known to be selfish. I did not think there was any doubt about that. The boy must not be ruined for an old man's whim, even if it is true."

"It is dreadful to go against you," said the Vicar, looking at her with piteous eyes, beseeching her forgiveness ; "but Randolph is in the right. Nello is losing his time ; he is doing no good ; he ought to go to school."

"You too !" cried Mary. She could not but smile, though the tears were in her eyes. And poor Mr. Pen's dissent from her cost the good man so much. He looked at her, his eyes too filling, with deprecating, beseeching, wistful looks, as a dog does. When he thus took part so distinctly against Mary, conscience, it was clear, must have been strong within Mr. Pen. He had tried hard for her sake to overcome the habit of irregular hours and desultory occupation which had grown upon him, and to give the children their lessons steadily, at the same hours, day by day. But poor Mr. Pen had not known how hard it would be to accomplish this. The idea of being able to make up the failing lessons at any odd moment which made the children at the Vicarage so uncertain in their hours, had soon returned after the first bracing up of duty towards Lillas and Nello had come to an end. And then Mrs. Pen had been ill, and could not bear the noise of the children ; and then the Squire had been ill, upsetting everybody and everything ; and then—the Vicar did not know what more to say for himself. He had got out of the way of teaching, out of the habit of exact hours, and Emily had been very poorly, and, on the whole, Randolph was right, and the boy ought to go to school.

Several of these discussions, however, took place before Mary gave way. The account Randolph had heard of the last scene in the library, before the Squire had his "stroke," had not been at all satisfactory to his mind. He sincerely believed (though with an uneasy sense of something in it that sounded like truth) that this story was a fabrication to suit a purpose. But, on the other hand, his own intentions were very distinct. The mere fact that such a story had been invented showed the meaning on the other side. This boy was to be foisted into the place which, for years, he had supposed himself to occupy. John not being possible, who but Randolph could fill that place ? Another heir was ridiculous, was shameful, and a wrong to him. He would not suffer it. What right had John, an outlaw and exile, to have

a son, if it came to that? He would not allow the child to stay here to be petted and pampered, and made to believe himself the heir. For, in the end, Randolph had made up his mind that the boy could not and should not be admitted to the advantages of heirship without a very different kind of proof of identity from any they possessed. And it would be ruin to the child to be allowed to fill such a false position now. The mere idea of it filled him with suppressed rage. He did not mean the boy any harm—not any real harm. On the contrary, it would be a real advantage to him in any case to be bred up frugally and industriously; and this he would insist upon, in spite of every resistance. He would not leave the child here to have him wormed into the old man's affections, made a tool of by Mary in John's interests, and to his own detriment. He was determined to get rid of Nello, whatever it cost him: not to do him harm, but to get him out of the way. This idea began to possess him like a mania—to get rid of the child who was more dangerous, a great deal more dangerous, than John himself. And all the circumstances of the house favoured his removal at this moment, when the Squire's illness occupied everybody's attention. And then it was a great point to have enlisted on his side the reluctant and abashed, yet conscientious support of Mr. Pen.

As for the children themselves, a subtle discomfort had stolen into their life. The old gentleman's illness, though it did not affect them, affected the house. The severe and dangerous illness of an important member of any household has always a confusing influence upon domestic life. It changes the centre of existence, so that everything, which once radiated from the cheerful hearth becomes absorbed in the sick-chamber, making of it the temporary and fictitious centre of the dwelling. In this changed orbit, all the stars of the household firmament shine, and beyond it everything is left cold, and sunless, and neglected. Children are always the first to feel this atmospheric change, which affects them more than it does the watchers and nurses, whose time and minds are absorbed in the new occupation. It was as if the sun had gone out of the sky to the children at Penninghame. They were left free indeed, to go and come as they liked, nobody attempting to hustle them out of the way, to

say, "Run, children, some one is coming." All the world might go and come, and it did not matter. Neither did it matter to them now where they went, for every room was equally dreary and empty. Mary, who meant home to them, and to whom they carried all their grievances and pleasures, had disappeared from their view; and Miss Brown, who was their directress in minor matters, had become invisible too, swallowed up by that sick-room, which absorbed everything. It was no pleasure to roam about the drawing-room, generally forbidden ground, and even through and through the passages from the hall to the dining-room, though they had so often longed to do it, when nobody was to be found there, either to laugh with them, or to find fault. Even Eastwood was swept up in the same whirlpool; and as for Mary, their domestic divinity, all that was seen of her was when she passed from one room to another, crossing the corridor, disappearing within the door of the mysterious chamber, where doctors and nurses, and every sort of medicine, and drinks, and appliances of all kinds, were being taken. How could the old gentleman want so much? Twice over a new kind of bed was taken into that strange gulf of a sick-room, and all so silently—Eastwood standing on the stairs, deprecating with voice and gesture, "No noise, no noise!" That was what everybody said. Mary would smile at them when she met them, or wave her hand from the end of the corridor, or over the stairs. Sometimes she would pause and stoop down and kiss them, looking very pale and worn out. "No, dear, he is no better," she would say. Except for these encounters, and the accounts which the servants gave them of their grandfather's state,—how he was lying, just breathing, knowing nobody, not able to speak,—accounts which froze the children's blood in their veins—they had no life at all; only dull meals which they ate under this shadow, and dull hours in which, having nothing to do, they huddled together, weary and lonely, and with nothing before them but to go to bed. Out of doors it was not much better. Mr. Pen had fallen into all the old disorder of his ways, out of which he had made a strenuous effort to wake for their benefit. He never was ready for them when they went with their lessons. "I will hear you to-morrow," he would say, looking at them with painful

humility, feeling the grave countenance of Lilius more terrible than that of any judge ; and when to-morrow came, there were always a hundred excuses. " Go on to the next page and learn the next lesson. I have had such a press of work—and Mrs. Pennithorne is so poorly," the poor man would say. All this shook the pillars of the earth to Lilius and Nello. They were shaken out of everything they knew, and left to blunder out their life as best they could, without any guide.

And this was hardest upon the one who understood it least. Lilius, whose mind was open to everything, and who sat looking out as from a door, making observations, keenly interested in all that went on, and at the same time with a reserve of imagination to fall back upon, was fully occupied at least if nothing more. Every day she watched for " Mr. Geoff " with news of her father. The suspense was too visionary to crush her with that sickening depression which affects elder minds. All had a softening vagueness and confusion to the child. She hoped and hoped, and cried with imaginative misery, then dried her eyes and hoped again. She thought everything would come right if Mr. Geoff would only bring papa ; and Mr. Geoff's ability sooner or later to find and bring papa she never doubted. It was dreadful to have to wait so long—so long ; but still every morning, any morning he might come. This hope in her mind absorbed Lilius, and made her silent, indisposed for play. At other times she would talk eagerly, demanding her brother's interest and response to things he did not understand. Children can go on a long time without understanding, each carrying on his or her monologue, two separate streams, which, flowing tranquilly together, feel like something mutual, and answer all the ends of intercourse ; and in this way neither of them was aware how far apart they were. But Nello was dull ; he had so little to do. He had no pony, he could not play cricket as Johnny Pen did with the village boys. He was small, even for his age, and he had not been educated in the art of knocking about as English boys are. He was even a little timid of the water and the boats, in which other boys might have found solace. Half of his time he wandered about, listless, not knowing what to make of himself.

This was the condition of mind in which Randolph met him

on one of these lingering afternoons. The child had strayed out all by himself; he was standing by the water-side at his old amusement, but not enjoying it this time. "What are you doing?" said his uncle, calling out to him as he approached. Randolph was not a favourite with the children; but it was half an amusement to see any one coming near, and to have to answer a question. He said "Nothing," with a sigh; not a single skip could he get out of those dull slates. The water would not carry them; they would not go; they went to the bottom with a prosaic splash and thud. How different from that day with the old gentleman, when they flew as if they had been alive! Perhaps this new comer might have luck, and do as well as the old gentleman. "Will you have a try?" he said; "here is a good one—it ought to be a good one; but I can't make them go to-day."

"I—have a try?" Randolph was startled by the suggestion. But he was anxious to conciliate the little fellow whom he wanted so much to get rid of. And it was only for once. He took suspiciously (for he was always suspicious) the stone Nello held out to him, and looked at it as if it might be poison—or it might be an attempt on his dignity got up by somebody. When he had satisfied himself that it was a common piece of slate, he took courage, and, with a smile that sat very awkwardly upon his face, threw it, but with the most complete unsuccess.

"Ah! you are not good, like the old gentleman; his skipped seven times! He was so clever at it! I wish he was not ill," said Nello, checking an incipient yawn. It was, perhaps, the first time any one had uttered such a wish. It had been taken for granted, even by his daughter, that the Squire's illness was the most natural thing in the world.

"Did he really come and play with you? But old men are no better than children," said Randolph. "I suppose he had nothing else to do."

"It is very nice to have somebody to play with when you have nothing else to do," said Nello, reflectively. "And he was clever. You—you don't know even how to throw; you throw like a girl—like this. But this is how the old gentleman did," cried Nello, suiting the action to the word, "and so do I."

"Do you know nothing but these baby-games? I suppose you never played cricket?" said Randolph, with, though he was a man, a pleasurable sense of being thus able to humiliate the little creature beside him. Nello coloured to the roots of his hair.

"I do not like cricket. Must every one like the same things? It is too hot; and one cannot play by oneself," the boy added with a sigh.

"You ought not to play by yourself, it is not good for you. Have you no one to play with, little boy?"

"Nobody," said Nello, with emphasis; "not one person. There is Lily; but what does it matter about a girl? And sometimes Johnny Pen comes. He is not much good; he likes the green best, and all the village boys. Then they say I am too little;—and I don't know them," the boy added with a gleam of moisture in his eyes. The village boys had not been kind to Nello; they had laughed at him for a little foreigner, and made remarks about his hair, which was cut straight across his forehead. "I don't want to know them." This was said with vehemence; for Nello was sore at the want of appreciation which had been shown him. They did not care for *him*, but they made a great deal of Johnny Pen!

"You should go to school; that is where all boys should go. A boy should not be brought up like a little girl; he should learn to use his hands, and his fists even. Now, what should you do if there was a fight?"

"A fight?" Nello grew pale and then grew red. "If it was—some one else, I would walk away; but if it was me—if any one touched me, I should kill him!" cried the child, setting his little white teeth.

Randolph ought professionally to have improved the occasion; but he only laughed—that insulting laugh which is offensive to everybody, and specially exasperates a child. "How could you kill him? That is easier said than done, my boy."

"I would get a gun, or a sword; but first," said Nello, calming down, "I would tell him to go away, because I should not *wish* to kill him. I have seen people fighting with guns and swords—have you?"

Here Randolph, being obliged to own himself inferior, fell back upon what was right, as he ought to have done before.

" Fighting is very wrong," he said. " It is dreadful to think of people cutting each other to pieces, like wild beasts ; but it is not so bad if you defend yourself with your fists. Only foreigners fight with swords ; it is thoroughly un-English. You should never fight ; but you would have to defend yourself if you were at school."

Nello looked at his uncle with an agreeable sense of superiority. " But I have seen *real* fighting," he said ; " not like children. I saw them fighting the Austrians—that was not wrong. Papa said so. It was to get back their houses and their country. I was little then, and I was frightened. But they won ! " cried the boy, with a gleam in his dark eyes. What a little savage he was ! Randolph was startled by the sudden reference to " papa," and this made him more warm and eager in his turn.

" Whoever has trained you to be a partisan has done very wrong," he said. " What do you know about it ? But look here, my little man. I am going away on Friday, and you are to come with me. It will be a great deal better for you than growing up like a little girl here. You are exactly like a little girl now, with your long hair and your name which is a girl's name. You would be Jack if you were at school. I want to make a man of you. You will never be anything but a little lady if you don't go to school. Come ; you have only to put on a frock like your sister. Nelly ! Why, that's a girl's name ! You should be Jack if you were at school."

" I am not a girl ! " cried Nello. His face grew crimson, and he darted his little brown fist—not so feebly as his size promised—in his uncle's face. Randolph took a step backwards in his surprise. " I hate you ! " cried the child. " You shall never, never come here when I am a man. When the old gentleman is dead, and papa is dead, and everything is mine, I will shut up all the doors, I will turn out the dogs, and you shall never come here. I know now it is true what Lily says—you are the bad uncle that killed the babes in the wood. But when I am a big man and grown up, you shall never come here ! "

" So ? " said Randolph, furious but politic ; " it is all to be

yours? I did not know that. The castle, and the woods, and everything? How do you know it will be yours?"

"Oh! everybody knows that," said Nello, recovering his composure as lightly as he had lost it; Martuccia and every one. But first the old gentleman must be dead, and, I think, papa. I am not so sure about papa. And do you think they would teach me cricket at school, and to fight? I don't really care for cricket, not really. But Johnny Pen and the rest, they think so much of it. I should like to knock down all their wickets, and get all the runs; that would teach them! and lick them after!" said the bloodthirsty Nello, with gleaming eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN APPARITION.

THUS Randolph overcame Nello's opposition to school, to his own extreme surprise. Though he had a child of his own, and all the experiences of a middle-aged clergyman, he had never yet learned the A B C of childhood. But it may be supposed that the conversation generally had not made him love his nephew more dearly. He shook his fist at the boy as he ran along the water-side, suddenly seized by the delight of the novelty and the thought of Johnny Pen's envy. "If I had you, my boy!" Randolph said, between his teeth, thinking grimly of the heirship which the child was so sure of. Pride would have a fall in this as in other cases. The child's pretensions would not count for very much where he was going. To be flogged out of all such nonsense would be far the best thing for him; and a good flogging never did a boy much harm. Randolph, though he was not a bad man, felt a certain gratification in thinking of the change that would occur in Nello's life. There was nothing wrong about the school; it was a very humble place, where farmers' sons were trained roughly but not unkindly. It would make a man of the delicate little half-foreign boy, who knew

nothing about cricket. No doubt it would be different from anything he was used to; but what of that? It was the best thing for him. Randolph was not cruel, but still it gave him a little pleasure to think how the impudent little wretch would be brought to his senses; no harm done to him—no *real* harm—but only such a practical lesson as would sweep all nonsense out of his head. If Nello had been a man of his own age, a rival, he could not have anticipated his humiliation with more zest. He would have liked to be a boy himself to fag the little upstart. There would be probably no fagging at the farmers' school, but there would be—well! he smiled to himself. Nello would not like it; but it would bring the little monkey to his senses, and for that good purpose there was no objection to be taken to the means.

And as he walked through the Chase, through the trees, seeing in the distance before him the blunt turret-chimneys, all veiled and dignified with ivy, of the old house, many thoughts were in Randolph's heart. He was a Musgrave, after all, if not a very fine example of the race. His wife was well off. If it had not been for John, who was a criminal, and this boy—what he would have done for the old place! What he might do still, if things went—well! Was that, perhaps, the word to use—well? That is, if John could be somehow disposed of, prevented from coming home, and the boy pushed quietly to one side. As for John, he could not come home. It would be death—perhaps; certainly renewed disgrace. He would have to stand his trial, and, if he fled from that trial once, how was he likely to be able to face it now? He would stay abroad, of course—the only safe place for him. If he could but be communicated with, wherever he was, and would send for his son and daughter, some arrangement might be made: a share of the income settled upon him, and the family inheritance left for those who could enjoy it. This would be, in every way, the best thing that could be done; best for John himself; best for the house which had been always an honourable one, and never connected with disgrace. It is so easy to believe what one wishes that Randolph, after a while, going over the subject in his mind, succeeded in smoothing away all difficulties, except, indeed, the initial one of getting

into correspondence, one way or another, with John. If this could be done, surely all the rest was smooth enough ! John was not a fool ; he must see that he could not come home. He must see how difficult it would be to prove his marriage and his son's birth, and make everything clear (though why this should be so difficult Randolph did not explain even to himself). Then he must see equally well that, to put the property and the old castle into the hands of a man with money, who could really do something to improve them, would be far better for the family than to go on as he (John) must do, having no money, if even he could come lawfully into possession. All this was so evident, no man in his senses could refuse to see it. And as for communicating with John: there was, of course, one way, which seemed the natural way, and which surely must be infallible in that case as in most other cases—the *Times*. However far out of the world John might be, surely he would have opportunities from year to year of seeing the *Times*! No Englishman, even though banished, could live without that. And, sooner or later, if often enough repeated, the advertisement must reach him. Suppose it to be put something in this form :—“J. M., of P.—His brother R. wishes to communicate with him on urgent business connected with the death of their father.” This would attract no particular attention from any one, and John could not fail to perceive that he was meant. Thus he had, to his satisfaction, made everything clear.

It was just when he came to this satisfactory settlement of the difficulty, so perfectly easy in theory, though no doubt there might be certain difficulties about carrying it out, that Randolph suddenly saw, a little way before him, some one making his way through the trees. The Chase was private, and very few people had the right of coming here ; neither did Randolph see whence this unexpected passenger had come, for there was no tributary path by which he might have made his way down to the foot-walk through the elms and oaks. He was within easy sight, obscured a little by the brushwood, and with his back to the spectator ; but the sight of him gave Randolph a great start and shock, which he could not very well explain. The man was in dark clothes, with a broad felt hat, quite unlike anything worn

in this district ; and there was something about his attitude and walk (no doubt a merely fantastic resemblance, or some impression on his mind from his pre-occupation with the idea of John) which recalled his brother to Randolph's mind. He was more startled than words could say. For a moment he could not even think or move, but stood open-mouthed, staring at the figure before him, which went on straight, not turning to the right or to the left.

When Randolph came to himself, he tried to laugh at his own folly—then coughed loudly and meaningly, by way of catching the stranger's attention, and seeing who it was. But his cough attracted no manner of attention from the wayfarer, who went on pushing through the trees, like one who knew every turn and winding. Randolph was at the end of his invention. . If he called out "Hi!" it might turn out to be somebody of importance. If he spoke more politely, and called the stranger to halt, he might be a nobody—if indeed it was not—. A vague impression, half of fear, came upon him. What nonsense it was ! In broad daylight, in so well-known and familiar a place. Had it been in the dark, in any of the ghostly passages of the old house ! but out here in the sunshine, in the open air !

Randolph took off his hat, to let the air blow freely about him, for he had grown hot and uncomfortable. His hand with the hat in it dropped for a moment between him and the other who was so near him. When he raised it again there was no one there. He rubbed his eyes, looked again, and darted forward to see whether the man was hiding among the trees ; but there was no one there. Randolph took off his hat once more, to wipe his streaming forehead ; his hand trembled so that he could scarcely do it. What did it mean ? When he had convinced himself there was no one to be seen, he turned and hurried away from the place, with his heart beating loudly in his breast. He never looked behind him, but hastened on till he had got to the broad road, where there was not a bush to hide an apparition. Then he permitted himself to draw breath.

It would be doing Randolph injustice to suppose that after he was out of the shadow of the trees, and in safety, with a broad level bit of road before him, on which everything was distinctly

visible all round, he could be capable of believing that he had seen a ghost. Nothing of the kind. It must have been one of the people about the place, poking among the bushes, who had disappeared under the branches of the trees, and whom he thought like John only because he had been thinking of John—or perhaps his thought of John had produced an optical delusion, and imagination had painted some passing shadow as a substantial thing, and endued it with his brother's image. It might have been merely an eccentric tree, on the outline of which fancy had wrought, showing a kind of grotesque resemblance. It might be, and probably was, just nothing at all. And it was supremely ridiculous that his heart should so thump for such an absurd delusion; but thump it did, and that in the most violent manner. He was out of breath, though he had made no exertion. And he could not pick up his thoughts where he had dropped them, when he saw that—figure. A thrill as of guilt was in his soul; he was afraid to begin again where he had left off. He found himself still rather breathless before the house, looking up at the veiled windows of his father's room. For the first time Randolph thought with a little awe of his father lying there between life and death. He had not thought of him at all in his own person, but rather of the Squire officially, the old life who kept a younger generation out of the estate. It was time the elders were out of the way, and age superseded by middle age. But now for a moment he realized the man lying helpless there, in the very pathway of death—not freed by the Great Deliverer, but imprisoned by Him, all his senses and faculties bound up, a captive tied hand and foot by the grim potency who conquers all men. Randolph was frightened altogether by the mysterious encounter and impressed with awe. If there had been daily service he would have gone to church, but as there was nothing of the sort in Penninghame, he went into the library to read a good book as the next best thing to do. But he could not stay in the library. The silence of it was awful. He seemed to see his father, seated there in his usual chair, silent, gazing at him with eyes of disapproval that went through and through him. After five minutes he could stand it no longer. He took his good book, and went out to the side of the water, within sight of the road

where people were coming and going. It was a comfort to him to see even the doctor's boy with his phials, and the footman who came with his mistress's card to inquire how the Squire was. And he looked out, but looked in vain, with mingled eagerness and fear for the broad hat he had seen so mysteriously appearing and disappearing. Who could it be?—some stranger astray in the Chase—some one of the many tourists who wander everywhere—or—Randolph shuddered in spite of himself.

It is generally people without imagination, or with the most elementary and rude embryo of that poetic faculty, who see ghosts. This sounds like a paradox, yet there is reason in it. The people who are literal and matter-of-fact in mind, are those to whom wonders and prodigies come naturally; those who possess the finer eye of fancy do not need those actual revelations. Randolph's was as stolid a mind as ever asked for a sign—and he had not asked for a sign in this case, nor felt that anything of the kind was necessary; but his entire mental balance was upset by what he had seen, or supposed himself to have seen; and he could not free his mind from the impression. As he sat and read, or rather pretended to read, his mind kept busy with the one question—What was it? Was it a real person, a stranger who had got astray, and stumbled into some copse or brushwood, which Randolph had forgotten—a man with a chance resemblance to John, heightened by the pre-occupation and previous reference to John in Randolph's mind? or was it John himself, come to look after his own interests—John—in the body, or out of the body, who could tell?

As for Nello, he ran home by the water-side, his mind possessed by the new thing that was about to be accomplished—school! Boys to play with, novelty of all kinds, and then that cricket, which he pretended to despise, but secretly admired and desired with all his heart—the game which came to Johnny Pen by nature, but which the little foreign boy could not master; all this buzzed through his little head. When he came home from school he would know all about it; he would have played with much better players than Johnny Pen ever saw. The revolution in his thoughts was great and sudden. But as he ran home, eager to tell Lillas about the change in his

fortunes, Nello too met with a little adventure. He came suddenly, just as he emerged from the woods upon the water-side where it was open to the road, on a man whom he had repeatedly seen before, and who was generally accompanied by a dog, which was Nello's admiration. The dog was not with his master now ; but he took a something white and furry out of his great pocket, which stopped Nello even in the hot current of his excitement.

"Would you like to have this, my little gentleman ?" the man said.

It was a white rabbit, with the biggest ears that Nello had ever seen. How his eyes danced that had been all aglow before !

"But I have no money," he said, disposed to cry in disappointment as sudden as his delight.

"It's not for money, it's a present," said the stranger, with a smile, "and I'll give you another soon. They tell me you're going to school, my young gentleman ; is that true ?"

"Am I to have it all for myself, or will you come back again for it, and take it away ? Oh yes, I'm going to school," said Nello, drooping into indifference. "Will it eat out of my hand ? Has it got a name ? And am I to have it all for myself ?" The rabbit already had eclipsed school for the moment in Nello's mind.

"It's all for you, and better things than that—and what day are you going, my bonnie little lad ?"

"To-morrow ; oh give it me ! I want to show it to Lily," cried the child. "Thank you very much. Let me run and show it to Lily. We never, never had a rabbit before."

The man stood and looked after Nello with a tender illumination of his dark face. "The old woman likes the other best ; but this one is mine," he said to himself. As for Nello, he flew home with his precious burden, out of breath. He said a man had given it to him ; but thought of the donor no more.

Randolph spent this, his last evening at home, in anything but an agreeable way ; he was altogether unhinged, nervous, and restless, not caring to sit alone. In this respect he was in harmony with the house, which was all upset, tremulous, and full of excitement and expectation. Human nature is always

impatient of the slow progress of fate. After the thunderclap of a great event, it is painful to relapse into stillness, and feel the ordinary day resuming its power without any following out of the convulsion. But dramatic sequence, rapidity, and completeness are rare in human affairs. All the little crowd of lookers-on outside the Squire's room watched eagerly for some change. Two or three women were always hanging about the passages, ready, as they said, to run for anything that might be wanted, and always in the way to learn if anything occurred. They kept a little lamp burning on the table against the wall, at either end of which was a chair, on which sometimes Cook herself, sometimes lesser functionaries, would be found, but always two together, throwing exaggerated shadows on the wall, and talking in whispers of their own fears, and how well they had perceived what was coming. There was not one of them that had not intended, one time or other, to make so bold as to speak to Miss Mary. "But trouble is always soon enough when it comes," they said, shaking their heads. Then Eastwood would come and join them, his shadow wavering over the staircase. When the privileged persons who had the *entrée* went or came, Miss Brown or the nurse, or even Mary herself, there was a little thrill and universal movement.

"Change! no, there's no change—there never will be but one change," Miss Brown said, standing solemnly by the table, with the light on her grave face; and it was upon this Rembrandtish group that Randolph came, as he wandered about in a similar frame of mind, glad to find himself in company with others, though these others were only the maids of the house.

"Is my father worse?" he asked, pausing, with his arm upon the banisters. Such a group of eager, pale faces! and the darkness all round in which others still might be lurking unseen.

"No change, sir," said Miss Brown, shaking her head. She was impatient too, like the rest, but yet felt a sort of superior resignation, as one who was in the front of affairs. And she had something to say besides. She gave a glance at the other women, who responded with secret nods of encouragement, then cleared her throat and delivered her soul—"Mr. Randolph, sir, might I make so bold as to say a word?"

"Say whatever you like," said Randolph. He could not

help but give a little glance round him, to make sure that there was no one else about.

"It is just this, sir—when you see him lying there, that white, as if he was gone already, and know that better he can't be—oh, it brings a many thoughts into the mind ! I've stood by dying beds before now, and seen them as were marked for death, but I never saw it more clear. And oh, Mr. Randolph, if there were things that might lie on his mind, and keep him from going quiet, as an old gentleman ought ! If there were folks he ought to see afore all's over——!"

"I don't see what you are driving at," Randolph said hastily.
"Speak out if you've anything to say."

"Oh, sir," said Miss Brown, don't you think——. I am not one that likes to interfere, but I am an old servant, and when a body has been long about a place, it's natural to feel an interest. If it wasn't your family at all—if it was another that your advice was asked for—shouldn't you say that Mr. John ought to know ?"

This appeal startled Randolph. He had not been looking for it ; and he gave an uncomfortable look round him. Then he felt a strange irritation and indignation that were more easy to express. "Am I my brother's keeper ?" he said. "I don't know where Mr. John is, that I should go and hunt for him to let him know."

"Oh, sir," said Miss Brown, "don't you be angry ! Cook here is like me : she thinks it's only his due. I would say it to Miss Mary, not troubling you that are 'most a stranger, but she's night and day, she never will leave her father ; she has a deal upon her. And a gentleman knows ways that womanfolk don't think of. If you would be but that kind, Mr. Randolph ! Oh, where there's a will there's always a way !"

"It is none of my business," said Randolph ; "and I don't know where he is," he added, looking round him once more. He might be here already in the dark, waiting till the breath was out of his father's body—waiting to seize possession of the house, felon as he was. And if Randolph was the means of betraying him into the hands of justice, what would everybody say ? He went abruptly away down the uncarpeted, polished stairs, on

which his hasty step rang and slid. John, always John ! he seemed to be in the air. Even Eastwood, when he attended him with his bed-candle, could not refrain from adding a word. "The doctor looks very serious, sir," Eastwood said ; "and if there's any telegraph to be sent, I'll keep the groom ready to go at a moment's notice. 'It would be well to send for all friends,' the doctor said."

"I don't know any one to send for," said Randolph peremptorily ; "let the groom go to bed." And he went to bed himself sooner than usual, to get rid of these appeals and of equally imperative thoughts. He went to bed, but he could not go to sleep, and kept his candle burning half the night. He heard the watchers moving about in his father's room, which was over-head, all the night through. Sometimes there would be a little rush of steps, and then he held his breath, thinking this might be at last the "change" which was looked for. But then everything grew still again, and he dozed, with the one poor candle, feeble but steadfast watcher, burning on till it became a pale intruder into the full glory of day.

Randolph, however, slept deeply in the morning, and got up with the greater part of those cobwebs blown away. John lost his hold upon the imagination in daylight, and he was able to laugh at his foolish alarm. How could it be John whom he had seen ? He durst not show himself in the country where still his crime was so well remembered, and the sentence out against him. And as for the appearance being anything more than mortal, or less than human, Randolph laughed at the state of his own nerves which rendered such an idea tenable for a moment. He was a materialist by nature—as so many are ; though he said his creed without any intrusive doubts ; and the absurdity was too patent after he had slept and been refreshed. But no doubt it was bad for his health, bad for his *morale*, to stay here. There was something in the atmosphere that was demoralizing ; the air had a creeping sensation in it as of something more than met the eye. Death was in it ; death, creeping on slowly, silently—loitering about with faint odours of mortality and sickening stillness. Randolph felt that he must escape into a more natural and wholesome air before further harm was done.

As for Mary, the occupations of the sick-room, and the sudden problems of the hereafter thus thrust upon her, were enough to fill her mind, and make her even comparatively indifferent to the departure of Nello, though it was against her judgment. It was not the hereafter of the spirit, which thus lay death-bound on the verge of the unseen, which occupied her. We must all die, everybody knows ; but who thinks it true in their own case until it comes ? Mary had known very well that a man much over seventy could not live very much longer ; but it was only when her father fell back in his chair unconscious, his body motionless, his mind veiled within blinding mists, that she felt the real weight of all that was to follow. It was for her to act as soon as the breath should be out of his body. She did not trust her younger brother, and she did not know what to do for her elder brother. The crisis had arrived while she was still unprepared. She went down mechanically to see Randolph go away, her eyes seeing many other things more clearly than she saw the two figures actually before her ; the man suspicious as usual, and putting no faith in her—the boy in a subdued excitement, his eyes sparkling with the light of novelty and adventure. Randolph had gone into his father's room that morning, and had walked suspiciously round the bed, making quite sure that the "no change" was true. "I suppose he may last like this for weeks yet ?" he said, in a querulous undertone—and yet not so low but that everybody heard it—to the doctor. "Oh, hush, for Heaven's sake, Randolph ! How can you tell that he does not hear ?" said Mary. "Pshaw ! how can he hear ?" Randolph replied, turning with a certain contempt from the helpless and powerless frame which lay there making no sign, yet living when it would be so much better that he should die. The awe of such a presence gives way to familiarity and weariness even with the most reverent watcher ; but Randolph, though he had no desire to be indecorous, could not help feeling a certain irritation at his father, who balked him by this insensibility just as he had balked him while yet he had all his wits about him. It seemed incredible that this half-dead, half-living condition, which brought everything to a standstill, should not be more or less a man's own fault.

Thus he went away, irritated and baffled, but still full of excitement; the moment which must decide all could not be very far off. He left the strongest charges upon the household, from his sister to Eastwood, to send for him instantly when "any change" occurred. "If it should be to-morrow," he said; "I shall hold myself always ready." He kept his eyes fixed on the Castle as long as he could see it, feeling that even now there might be a sign recalling him. And he thought he had made up his mind what to do. He would bring his wife with him and take possession at once. Mary would not be able to look after everything; or, at least, if she should be, she ought not to be; no really delicate-minded woman, no *lady* should be able to make any exertion at such a moment. He would come with his household, as a kindness to Mary, and take possession at once.

As for Nello, he took leave very cavalierly of Lilias, who cried, yet would not cry, angry at his desertion and deeply wounded by his indifference, at the door. Poor little Lilias, it was her first disappointment in life. He was not thinking of her, but a great deal of his new portmanteau and the sandwiches put up for him, and the important position as a traveller in which he stood—but neither was Nello unkind. He took pains to console his sister.

"Don't cry," he said, "Lily; I shall come back in the holidays, and sometimes I will write you letters; and there is always the white rabbit I gave you, and little Mary Pen for you to play with."

"I don't want to play," said Lilias, with a burst of tears; "is play everything? I am too old for that. But oh, Nello, you are going to leave me, and you don't care. You do not care for Mary, or Martuccia, or any one. Me, I should not mind—but you do not love *any one*. You care for nobody but yourself."

"Oh yes I do," said Nello, "everybody," and he cracked the coachman's whip which was placed in readiness; "but boys have to go out and see the world; Eastwood says so. If I don't like being at school I shall come back and stay at home, and then you will have me again; but I hope not, and I don't think so, for school is jolly, very jolly, so Uncle Randolph says."

" You can go with Uncle Randolph," cried Lilias, in a blaze of sharp anger, " and I hope you will not come back. I hope you will always stay away, you cruel, cruel boy ! "

This bewildered Nello for a moment, as did the hurried wiping of Lilias' eyes and the tremulous quiver of her lip with which it was accompanied ; but there was no time for more. He laughed and waved his hand to her as he was hurried into the carriage. He had scarcely ever looked so gay before. He took off his hat and waved it as he went out of sight. Hurrah ! they heard his shrill little voice shouting. Lilias sat down on the ground and cried her heart out. It was not only that he was unkind—but Nello thus showed himself wanting to all the needs of the situation. No little hero of a story had ever gone away without a tribute to the misery of parting. This thought contracted her heart with a visionary pang more exquisite than the real. Nello was no hero, nothing but a little cruel, common, vulgar boy, not fit to put into any story, to go away so.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LOVES OF THE ANGELS.

WHILE these events were going on at the Castle, Lord Stanton, for his part, had come to a standstill in the matter which he had been drawn into so inadvertently, and which had become so very serious an occupation in his life. He was young, and unacquainted with the ways of the world, and he did not know what step to take next. And he too was paralyzed by the sudden catastrophe which had happened to the Squire. Was it his fault ? He could scarcely help an uneasy sense that by agitating him unduly he had helped to bring on the sudden attack, and thus he had left the Castle that evening with a heavy burden on his mind. And Geoff, with entire unconsciousness of the lingering pangs of life and the tenacity of the human frame, believed, without any doubt, that Mr. Musgrave would die, and did not know what was to be done about the exile, whose condition would thus be completely

changed. In the mean time it seemed to him necessary to wait until the issue of this illness should be known. Thus his doubtfulness was supplanted by an apparent necessity, and the time went on with nothing done.

He went at first daily to inquire for the old man, and never failed to see Liliás somewhere waiting for him with serious, intent face, and eyes which questioned even when the lips did not speak. Liliás did not say much at any time. She examined his face with her eyes and said "Papa?" with a voice which trembled; but it became by degrees less easy to satisfy Liliás by telling her, as he did so often, that he had not forgotten, that he was doing everything that could be done, smoothing the way for her father's return, or waiting till he could more successfully smooth the way. "You do not believe me, Lily," Geoff said, with a sense of being doubted, which hurt him sadly. "Yes; but he is not your papa, Mr. Geoff, and you are grown up and don't want any one," Liliás said, with her lip quivering. The visionary child was deeply cast down by the condition of the house and the recollection of the melancholy rigid figure which she had seen carried past, with a pang of indescribable pain and terror. Liliás seemed to see him lying in his room, where Mary now spent almost all her time, pale with that deadly ashen paleness, his faded eyes half open, his helpless hands lying like bits of rag, all the grey fingers huddled together. Fright and sorrow together brought a sob out of her heart whenever she thought of this; not moving, not able to speak, or turn round, or look up at those who watched him; and still not dead! Liliás felt her heart stand still as she thought of her grandfather. And she had no one to take refuge with. Martuccia was frightened too, and would not go up or down stairs alone. Liliás, for her part, did all she could, out of pride, and shame of her own weakness, to conceal her terror; but oh, to have papa nigh to creep close to, to feel safe because he was there! A few tears dropped from her eyes. "You are grown up and you don't want any one." This went to Geoff's heart.

"Oh Lily, don't you think they would let you come to my mother?" he cried; "this is too sad for you, this dismal house; and if Nello goes away as you said——"

"Do you think I would go and leave Mary all alone? Nobody is sorry for Mary except me—and Mr. Pen. When she comes out of her room I go and I kiss her hand, and she cries. She would be more ill and more weary," said Lilias, with a precocious understanding, "if there was not some little thing to give her an excuse and make her cry."

"My little Lily! who taught you all that? it must have been the angels," cried Geoff, kissing in his turn the little hand.

But this touch had the same effect upon Lilias that her own kiss had on Mary. She cried and sobbed and did her best to swallow it down. "Oh Mr. Geoff! I want papa!" she cried, with that little convulsive break in her voice which is so pitiful in a child. She was seated on Mary's chair at the door of the hall, and he on the threshold at her feet. Geoff did not know what kind of half-admiring, half-pitying sentiment he had for this child. He could not admire her enough, or wonder at her. She was but a child, not equal to him in his young manhood; and yet that very childhood in its unconsciousness was worlds above him, he thought. He felt like the man in the story who loved the fairy maiden—the young Immortal; would she give up her visionary paradise for his sake and learn to look at him, not as an angel but as a woman? but for that she must be a woman first, and at present she was but a child. When he kissed her hand it cost Lilias no blush. She accepted it with childish, angelical dignity. "She took the kiss sedately—" and the dark fountains of her eyes filled full, and two great tears tumbled over, and a piteous quiver came to her lips, and she said, "Oh, Mr. Geoff, I want papa!"

This was when the Squire had been ill about a week, six or seven days before Randolph took Nello away. Geoff went home riding, very full of thought. What could he do to please his little Lily? He preferred that she should creep close to himself and tell him her troubles, but he could not resist that plaint, and even though it should be against himself he must try what he could do to bring her father to her. Geoff thought a great deal on this subject, but it was very fatiguing and unsatisfactory, for he did not know what to do, and after a while he relapsed into the pleasanter path, and began to think of Lily. "Because of the angels," he said to himself as he jogged softly along, much

more slowly and reflectively than his horse liked to go. He forgot where he was going and the engagements he had, and everything that was practical and important, as he rambled on. The day was sweet in early autumn, the lake rippling musically upon the beach, the sky blue and crossed by floating atoms of snowy cloud. Everything in the world was sweet and pleasant to the young man. "Because of the angels ;" he had never been quite clear what these words meant, but he seemed to see quite plainly now, though he could no more have explained than he could have written *Hamlet*. "Because of the angels !" He seemed to make a little song of it as he went on, a drowsy, delicious burden like the humming of the bee. It was not he that said it, he thought, but it murmured all about him, wrapping him in a soft enchantment. Such a visionary love as his, perhaps, has need of those intoxications of ethereal fancy : for nothing can be so like the love of an angel as that of a young man possessed by a tender visionary passion for a child.

Geoff was so rapt in his own thoughts that he did not see for some time the beckonings and signals that were coming to him from a carriage drawn up on the road to which the path descended, along which he was moving so gently. When his attention was at last caught, he saw it was his Cousin Mary, leaning half out of the window in her eagerness.

"Give your horse to the footman and come in here—I have so much to say to you," she said.

But when he had done as she told him and taken his seat beside her, Lady Stanton kept looking at her young cousin.

"What is it?" she said ; "you keep on smiling, and there is a little drowsy, dreamy, intoxicated air about you ; what has happened, Geoff?"

"Nothing ; and it is unkind to say I look intoxicated. Could you not find a prettier word?"

"I believe you are really, really !—Geoff, I think I know what it means, and I hope it is somebody very nice. Tell me, who is she ?"

"This is strange," said Geoff ; "indeed, it is true, I have been visiting a lady ; but she is only twelve years old," he said, turning to her with a vivid blush.

"Oh, Geoff!" Mary's brow contracted, "you do not mean *that* little girl?"

"Why shouldn't I mean her? I will make you my confessor, Cousin Mary. I don't think I shall ever marry any one but little Lily. Of course she is very little, and when she is grown up she will probably have nothing to say to me; but I shall never care for any one else. Why should you shake your head? I never saw any one like her," said Geoff, growing solemn, and shaking off his blush as he saw himself opposed.

"Oh, Geoff!" Mary shook her head and contracted her beautiful brow, "I do not think anything good can come out of that family; but I must not speak. I am jealous, I suppose. How did you know I did not want you for Annie or Fanny?" she went on with a smile that was a little strained and fictitious; for Mary knew very well that she was jealous, but not for Annie, or Fanny, or Geoff.

"Hush," he said, "I loved you before Lily, but you could not have me; it is Lily, failing you. If you could but have seen her just now! The Squire is lying between life and death, and Miss Musgrave, who was so good to her, is with him night and day, and poor little Lily is so lonely and frightened. She looks at me with her little lip all quivering, and says, 'Papa! I want papa.'" Geoff almost cried himself to recollect her piteous tone, and the tears came to Mary's eyes.

"Ah! if she takes after *him*, Geoff! but that is just what I want to talk to you about. I have done something that you may think rash. I have spoken to Sir Henry. He is—well, he has his faults like the rest of us—but he is just; he would not do a wrong thing. I told him that you had found out something——"

"What did he say?" cried Geoff, breathless, for Lady Stanton made a sudden pause.

She was looking across him out at the window; her eyes had strayed past his face, looking away from him as people do with a natural artifice to allow the first signs of displeasure to blow over, before they look an offended person in the face. But as she looked, Lady Stanton's countenance changed, her lips fell apart, her eyes widened out, her face paled, as if a cloud had

passed over it. She gave a great cry, "Oh John, *John!*" she said.

"What is it?—who is it?" cried Geoff.

She made him signs to have the carriage stopped; she could not speak. Geoff did what he could to make the coachman hear him; but it was by no means the affair of a moment to gain the attention of that functionary, and induce him to stop. When, however, this was accomplished, Geoff obeyed the passionate desire in Lady Stanton's face, who all the time had been straining to look out, and jumped to the ground. He looked round anxiously, while she, half out of the carriage, gazed back, fixing her eyes upon one of those recesses in the road which are common in the north country. "I see no one," said Geoff. He came back to the place on which her gaze was fixed, and looked behind the wall that bounded it, and all about, but could see nothing. When he returned he found that Mary had fallen back in her corner, and was weeping bitterly. "He looked at me with such reproachful eyes. Oh, he need not; there was no reason. I would have saved or served him with my life," she cried; "and he had never any claim on me, Geoff, never any claim on me!—why should he come and look at me with such reproachful eyes? If he is dead, he ought to know better than that. Surely ne ought to know——"

The carriage, standing in the middle of the road, the young man searching about, not knowing what he was looking for; the coachman superbly indifferent on the box, contemplating the agitation of his inferiors with god-like calm; the footman, on Geoff's horse, with his mouth open, staring, while the beautiful lady wept inside, made the strangest picture. As a matter of course, the footman, riding on in advance, had seen nothing and nobody. He avowed frankly that he was not taking any notice of the folks on the road. He might have seen a man seated on the stones, he could not be certain. Neither had the coachman taken any notice. Foot passengers did not interest either of these functionaries. And Lady Stanton did not seem able to give any further explanation. The only thing to be done was to go on. She had been on her way to Stanton to give Geoff the advantage of Sir Henry's advice and opinion, and thith. r,

accordingly, they proceeded after this interruption. Geoff took his place again beside his cousin, perhaps a little impatient of the stoppage ; but as she lay back in the corner, covering her face with her hands, Geoff's heart was too soft not to forget every other sentiment. He thought only of consoling her.

"Tell me what it was," he said, soothingly. "You saw—some one ? Do not cry so bitterly. You never harmed anybody in your life. Tell me—you thought you saw——?"

"I saw *him*, as plainly as I see you, Geoff ; don't tell me it was a fancy. He was sitting, resting, like a man tired with walking, dusty and worn out. I noticed his weary look before I saw his face, and just as we passed he raised his head. Oh, why should he have looked at *me* like that, Geoff ? No, I never did any one harm, much less him. I have always stood up for him, you know, since you first spoke to me. I have always said, always—even before this was found out : living people mistake each other continually ; but the dead—the dead ought to know——"

"Who is dead ?" said Geoff ; "are you speaking of John Musgrave, who is as much alive as I am ?" .

"If he were a living man," said Mary, solemnly, "how could I have seen him ? Geoff, it is no mistake. I saw him, as I see you."

"And is that why you think him dead ?" said Geoff, with natural surprise.

Lady Stanton raised herself erect in her corner. "Geoff, oh, can you not understand ?" she cried. But she did not herself quite understand what she meant. She thought from the suddenness of it, from the shock it gave her, and from the disappearance of the wayfarer, which was so inexplicable, that it was an apparition she had seen. John Musgrave could not be there, in the flesh, seated by the roadside ; it was not possible ; but when Geoff asked whether having seen him was an argument for thinking him dead, she had nothing to say. She wrung her hands. "I have seen him whether he is living or dead," she repeated, "and he looked at me with such eyes. He was not young as he used to be, but worn, and a little grey. I came to tell you what Sir Henry said ; but here is something far, far

more important. Know him ! Could I mistake him, do you think ?—how could I mistake him ? Geoff, how could it be *he*, sitting there without any warning, without a word ? but if it was he, if that was possible, why are we going on like this ? Are we to desert him ?—give him up ? I am talking folly,” she said, again clasping her hands. “ Oh, Geoff, a living man would not have looked at me with such eyes.”

“ He has not very much right to happy eyes, has he ?” said Geoff : “ coming home an outlaw, not venturing to speak to any one. It would not be half so sad if he were a ghost. But to come back, and not to dare to trust even his friends, not to know if he has any friends, not to be able to go home and see his children like any other man, to rest on the stones at the roadside, he to whom all the land belongs ! I don’t wonder he looked sad,” cried Geoff, half-sympathetic, half-indignant. “ How was he to know even that he would find a friend in you ?”

Mary was sobbing, scarcely able to speak. “ Oh, tell them to go back again—tell them to go back,” she cried. There was no way of satisfying her but this : the carriage turned slowly round, rolling like a ship at sea. The coachman was disgusted and unwilling. “ What did she want now ?” he said, telegraphing with uplifted hands and eyes to the surprised footman on Geoff’s horse. Lady Stanton was not a hard mistress like her stepdaughters, nor fantastical and unreasonable as they were. She took the carriage humbly when she could get it, and would consult this very coachman’s convenience before bringing him out, which no one else thought of doing. Nevertheless Lady Stanton had her character in the house, and human nature required that it should be kept up. She was the stepmother, the scapegoat. “ What is she after now ?” the coachman said.

She got out of the carriage herself, trembling, to aid in the search, and the footman getting down, looked everywhere, even under the stones, and in the roadside hedges, but no one was there. When they resumed their way again, Mary lay back in her corner too much worn out with excitement and emotion to be able even to speak. Geoff could not tell whether she was glad or sorry to be brought to acknowledge that it was more likely to be John Musgrave whom she had seen than his ghost. She was

convinced by his reasoning. Oh, yes ; no doubt, she said, it must be so. Because you saw a man unexpectedly, that was no reason for supposing him to be dead. Oh, no—Geoff was quite right ; she saw the reason of all he said. But Mary's head and her heart and all her being thrilled with the shock. There was a ringing in her ears, and pulses were beating all over, and her blood coursing through her veins. The very country, so familiar, seemed to change its aspect. No stronger commentary could have been on the passage of time than the sudden glimpse of the face which she had seen just now on the roadside. But Mary did not think of that. The lake and the rural road that ran by it, and the hills in the distance, seemed to take again the colours of her youth. He was nothing to her, and never had been. She had not loved him, only had "taken an interest." But all that was most poignant in her life came back to her, with the knowledge that he was here. Once more it seemed to be that time when all is vivid, when every day may be the turning-point of life—the time that was consciously but a drift and floating on of hour by hour when it existed, as is the present moment—but which, looking back upon it, seemed the time of free action, of choice, of every possibility. Was it so ? Might he be met with round any corner—this man who had been banished so long ? In the face of death and danger had he come back, he whom nobody had expected ever to come back ? A strange half-question whether everything else had come back with him, and half-certainty that nothing for her could change, was in Mary's mind as she lay back, quivering with emotion, hearing Geoff's voice in her ears, not knowing a word he said. What had Geoff to do with it—young Geoff, to whom nothing had ever happened ? She smiled vaguely to herself to think that the boy could think he knew. How was he to know ?—he was not of that time. But all the people in the road, and the very water itself, and the villages and houses, seemed to ask her, Was it true ?

This was all the evidence on the subject from which a judgment could be formed. Randolph Musgrave (who told no one) had seen, in his own words, a something, a some one, whose face he did not see, but who suggested John to him so strongly that his very heart seemed to stop beating—then disappeared. And Lady

Stanton from the window of the carriage, driving past, saw a face, which was John Musgrave's face grown older and worn, with hair that was slightly grey, instead of the brown curls of former years, and which disappeared too in the twinkling of an eye, and being searched for, could be found no more. What was it?—an apparition conjured up by their interest or their fears? or John Musgrave, in his own person, come home?

CHAPTER XXIX.

NELLO'S JOURNEY.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE drove from the door of his father's house with a sigh of relief, yet of anxiety. He had not done what he meant to do, and affairs were more critical than when he went to Penninghame a few weeks before; but it was something at least to be out of the troubled atmosphere, and he had arranged in his own mind what he should do, which was in its way a gain, as soon as the breath was out of the old man's body,—but when would that be? It was not to be desired, Randolph said to himself piously, that his father should linger long; his life was neither of use nor comfort to any one, and no pleasure, no advantage to himself. To lie there speechless, motionless, as much shut out of all human intercourse as if he were already in his coffin—what could any one desire but that, as soon as might be, it should come to an end?

He did not pay very much attention to his small companion. For the moment, Nello, having been thus secured and brought within his power, had no further importance, and Randolph sat with knitted brows pondering all he was to do, without any particular reference to the child. Nello had left the Castle easily enough; he had parted from Mary and from Lilius without any lingering of emotion, getting over it as quickly as possible. When it came to that he was eager to be off, to set out into the world. The little fellow's veins were full of excitement; he expected to see,

he did not know what wonderful things, what objects of entrancing interest, as soon as he got outside the little region where everything was known to him. "Good-bye, Mary—good-bye, Lily," he said, waving his hand. He had his own little portmanteau with his name on it, a new little silver watch in his pocket—what could child want more? Lily, though she was his sister, was not a sensation like that watch. He took it out, and turned it round and round, and opened the case, and wound it up—he had wound it up twice this morning already, so that one turn of the key was all that was practicable. Nothing at the Castle, nothing in the society of Lily, was equal to this. He compared his watch with the clock at the druggist's in the village and found it fast: he compared it with the clock at the station and found that slow. He did not take any notice of his uncle, nor his uncle of him; each was indifferent, though partly hostile, to the other. Randolph was at his ease because he had this child, this troublesome atom, who might do harm though he could do no good, in his power; but Nello was at his ease through pure indifference. He was not at the moment frightened of his uncle, and no other sentiment in regard to him had been developed in his mind. As calm as if Randolph had been a cabbage, Nello sat by his side, and looked at his watch. The watch excited him, but his uncle—. Thus they went on, an unsympathetic pair. Nello stood about on the platform and looked at everything, while Randolph took the tickets. He was slightly hurt to hear that a half-ticket was still enough for himself, and moved away at once to the other side of the station, where the locomotive enthralled him. He stood and gazed at it with transport. What he would have given to have travelled there with the man who drove it, and left Uncle Randolph behind! But still Nello took his place in the train with much indifference to Uncle Randolph. He was wholly occupied with what was going on before and about him: the rush across country, trees and fields flying by, and the stations where there was always something new, the groups of people standing about, the rush of some for the train, the late arrival just as the doors were shut of those who were too late. These last made Nello laugh, their blank looks were so funny—and yet he was sorry for them; for what a thing it must be, he thought,

to see other people go rushing out over the world to see everything, while you yourself were left dull at home ! He remembered once himself being left with Martuccia in the still, deserted house when all the others had gone to the *festa*; how he thought the day would never end—and Martuccia thought so too. This made him sorry, very sorry, for the people who had lost their train. It did not occur to Nello that it might be no *festa* he was going to, or they were going to. What could any one want more than the journey itself ? If you wearied of seeing the trains rush past, and counting the houses, now on one side, now on another, there was the endless pleasure of dashing up to one station after another, where Nello could look down with fine superiority on the people who were not going, on the children above all, who looked up envious, and envied him, he felt sure.

By and by, however, though he would not confess it to himself, the delights of the journey began to pall: his little eyes grew fatigued with looking, and his little mind with the continuous spectacle of those long, flying breadths of country ; and even the stations lost their charm. He would have liked to have somebody to talk to, and cast one or two wistful glances to see whether Uncle Randolph was practicable, but found no encouragement in that countenance, pre-occupied, and somewhat lowering by nature, which appeared now and then in the wavering of the train, over the newspaper his uncle was reading. What a long time it took to read that paper ! How it crackled when it was opened out ! How tired Nello grew of seeing it opposite to him ! And he began to grow cramped with sitting ; his limbs wanted stretching, his mind wanted change ; and he began to be hungry. Randolph, who scorned the poor refreshments of the railway, and thought it better to wait for his meal till he reached home, did not think of the difference between himself and the child. They travelled on and on through the dulness of the afternoon. Nello, who had been so excited, felt disposed to sleep, but was too proud to yield to it ; and then he began to think of his sister and the home he had left. It is natural, it is selfish, to remember home when we miss its comforts : but if that is not of the higher nature of love, it is yet the religion of the weak, and not despised by the great Succourer who bids men call upon Him in time of

trouble. Nello's heart, when he began to feel tired and famished, recurred, with a pathetic trust in the tenderness and in the certainty of the well-being that abode there, to his home.

When they stopped at a lively, bustling junction to change their direction, things mended a little. Nello ventured to buy himself a cake, his uncle not interfering, as they waited. "You will spoil your stomach with that sweet stuff," Randolph said, but he allowed the child to munch. And they had half-an-hour to wait, which of itself was something. Nello walked about, imitating Randolph's longer stride, though he did not accompany his uncle; and though he felt forlorn and very small among the crowd, marched about and looked at everything as the gentlemen did, recovering his spirits a little. And suddenly, with a great glow of pleasure all over him, Nello spied, among the strangers who were hurrying to and fro, a face he had seen before; it is true it was only the face of the countryman who had accosted him in the Chase, and with whom he had but a small acquaintance, but even this was something in the waste of the unknown that surrounded him. The boy rushed up to him with a gleam of joy upon his small countenance. "I say, have you come from—home?"

"Yes, my little gentleman," said Wild Bampfylde. "I'm taking a journey like you, but I like best to tramp on my two legs. I'm going no farther in your carriages, that give you the cramp. I reckon you're tired too."

"A little," said Nello; "but that's no matter. What have you in your basket?—is it another rabbit? I gave mine to Lily. They would not let me bring it, though I wanted to bring it. School, you know," said the boy, seriously, "is not like home. You have to be just like as if you were grown up there. Little—you cannot help being little; but you have to be like as if you were grown up there."

"Ay, ay, that's the way to take it," said the countryman, looking down with a twinkle in his eye, half smiling, half sad, at the small creature beside him. "The thing is to be a man, and to mind that you must stand up like a man, whatever happens. If one hits you, you must hit him again, and be sure not to cry."

"Hit me!" said Nello—"cry? Ah, you do not know the

kind of school I am going to—for you are not a gentleman,” he added, looking with superb condescension at his adviser. “I like you just the same,” said Nello, “but you are not a gentleman, are you? and how can you know?”

“The Lord forbid!” said Bampfylde, “one’s enough in a family. It would be ill for us, and maybe for you too, if I were a gentleman. Look you here, my little man. Look at the bonnie bird in this basket—it’s better than your rabbit. A rabbit, though it’s one o’ God’s harmless creatures, has little sense, and cannot learn; but this bonnie thing is of use to God and man, as well as being bonnie to look at. Look at him! what a bonnie head he has, and an eye as meaning as your own.”

“A pigeon!” said Nello, with a cry of delight. “Oh, I wish I might have him! Do you think I might have him? I could put him under the seat, and nobody would see the basket; and then when we got there——”

“Ay, that’s the question—when you got there?”

“I would say—it was my—fishing-basket,” said Nello. “He said they went fishing; and nobody would know. I would say Mary had—put things in it: nobody would ever find out, and I would keep it in my room, and buy seed for it and give it water, and it would live quite comfortable. And it would soon come to know me, wouldn’t it? and hop about and sit on my shoulder. Oh, let me have it; won’t you let me have it? Look here, I have a great deal of money,” cried Nello, turning out his pocket; “five shillings to spend, and a sovereign Mary gave me. I will give you money for it, as much money as ever you please——”

“Whisht, my little lad; put back your money and keep it safe, for you’ll have need of it. I brought the bird to give you. If they’re kind folks they’ll let you keep him. You must keep him safe, and take care he has his meat every day; and if they’re unkind to you or treat you bad, put you his basket in the window and open the lid, and, puff! he’ll flee away and let your friends know.”

“But I should not like him to flee away. I would like him to stay with me always, and sit on my shoulder, and eat out of my hand.”

"My little gentleman," said Bampfylde. "I'm afraid your uncle will hear us. Try to understand. If you're ill-used, if they're unkind, let the bird fly, and he'll come and tell us. Mind now, what I'm saying. He'll come and tell us. Did you never read in your story-books——"

"Then it is an enchanted bird," said Nello, looking down, very gravely, into the basket. Lily had read to him of such things. He was not very much surprised: but a bird that some day would turn into a young prince did not attract him so much as one that would hop on his shoulder without ulterior object. He looked down at it very seriously, with more respect perhaps, but not so warm an interest. His little face had lost its animation. How Lily would have glowed and brightened at the thought! But Nello was no idealist. He preferred a real pigeon to all the enchanted princes in the world.

"Nay," said Bampfylde, with a gleam of a smile across his dark face, "it's no fairy, but it's a carrier. Did you never hear of that? And when you let it fly it will fly to me, and let me know that you are wanting something—that they're not kind to you, or that you're wanting to be away."

"Oh, they'll be kind," said Nello, carelessly; "I would rather he would stay with me, and never, never fly away."

"I'll put him in the carriage for you," said Bampfylde, hurriedly, "for here's somebody coming. And don't you let any one know that you were speaking to me, or ever saw me before. And God bless you, my little gentleman!" said the vagrant, suddenly disappearing among the crowd.

While Nello stood staring after him, Randolph came up, and tapped him sharply on the shoulder.

"What are you staring at? Have you seen any one you know?"

It was Nello's first lesson in deceiving.

"I—I was looking at a man—with wild beasts," he said.

"With wild beasts!—in the station?—here?"

"Yes, white rabbits and pigeons—and things; at least," said Nello to himself, "he once had a white rabbit, if he hasn't got one now."

"Rabbits!" said Randolph. "Come along, here is our train.

It is late ; and before I have got you settled, and got back here again, and am able to think of myself, it will be midnight, I believe. You children don't know what a trouble you are. I shall have lost my day looking after you. I should have been at home now but for you ; and little gratitude I am likely to get, when all is done."

This moved Nello's spirit, for of all things in the world there is nothing that so excites opposition among great and little, as a claim upon our gratitude. Anything and everything else the mind may concede, but even a child kicks against this demand. Nello's feelings towards his uncle were not unkind ; but, little as he was, instinct woke in him an immediate resistance.

" It was not me that did it," he said ; " it was you. I should have stayed at home, and when the old gentleman is better he would have come out and played with me. And Mary would have let me stay. I like home," said Nello, " and perhaps I shall not like school ; but if I don't like it," he added, brightening and forgetting the secret he had been so sworn to keep, " I know how to get away."

" How shall you get away ?" said Randolph. But he was so sure of this matter, which was in his own hands, that he did not wait for any answer. " They will take care of that at school," he said ; " and it will be the worse for you, my boy, if you make yourself disagreeable. Come along, or we shall miss the train."

Nello saw that the basket had been placed under his seat as he got in ; and as the train swept away from the station, he caught a glimpse of the lonely figure of his new friend, standing among the little crowd that watched the departure. Bampfylde made a warning gesture to the child, who, forgetful of precaution, nodded and waved his hand in reply.

" Who is that ?" cried Randolph, suspiciously, getting up to cast a searching look behind.

" Oh, it is the man with the wild beasts," Nello said.

And then came another silent sweep through the green smooth country, which was not like the hilly north. It was all Nello could do to keep himself from pulling his basket from beneath the seat, and examining his new treasure. He could hear it

rustling and fluttering its wings against the wickerwork. Oh, to be able to take it out, to give it some crumbs of biscuit which were still in his pocket, to begin to train it to know him ! Nello only restrained himself painfully, by the thought that if he betrayed his own secret thus, his pigeon might be taken from him. How eager he was now to be there ! "Are there many more stations ?" he asked, anxiously ; then counted them on his fingers—one, two, three. And how delighted he was when they came at last to the little place, standing alone in a plain, with no other house visible that Nello could see (but he did not look ; he was so anxious about his pigeon), which was their journey's end. A kind of farmer's shandry, half cart, half gig, with a rough horse, and a rougher driver, was in waiting. Nello got his basket out with his own hands, and put his little great-coat over it, so that no one could see. His heart beat loudly with fright, lest his uncle should hear the sounds beneath the cover—the rustle and flutter. But Randolph's mind was otherwise engaged. As for the boy, he thought of nothing but this treasure, which he was so happy to feel in his arms. He could carry it so, quite comfortably, with the little great-coat over it ; he neither remarked the rudeness of the jolting vehicle, nor the bare country, with here and there a flat line of road running between turnip and potato fields. When they came to the house—a new, square house, in the middle of the fields—Nello thought nothing about it one way or another. He thought, "I wonder which will be my window ; I wonder where I can keep the bird." That was all. His little soul, all eagerness after his new delight, had room for nothing more.

Randolph and his charge were taken into a plain room, very simply furnished and not over-dainty in point of cleanliness, where the principal of the school, a man in rusty black, came to receive them. There was nothing repulsive in his looks, nothing more in any way than the same plain unvarnished rusticity and homeliness which showed in his house. The school was intended for farmers' sons, and the education was partly industrial—honest, simple training, without either deceit or villainy involved, though not at all suitable for Nello. It was with reluctance even that so young a boy had been accepted at all ; and the

schoolmaster looked at him with doubtfulness, as the slim little curled darling, so different from his other pupils, came in, hugging his basket.

"He's young, and he's small," said Mr. Swan.

"Very young, and small for his age," Randolph echoed. "All the more reason why he should lead an out-of-door life, and learn that he is a boy, and will one day be a man."

Then Nello was put into the hands of the principal's wife, while Randolph gave further directions.

"His case is quite peculiar," the uncle said. "He is an orphan, or as good as an orphan, and I took him from the hands of ladies who were making a fool of the boy. What he wants is hardening. You must not be led away by his delicate looks; he is a strong boy, and he wants hardening. Send him out to the fields, let him learn to work like the rest, and don't listen to any complaints. Above all, don't let him send complaints home."

"I never interfere with what they write home," said honest Mr. Swan.

"But you must in this case. If he sends home a complaining letter, his aunt will rush here next morning and take him away. I am his uncle, and I won't permit that—and a family quarrel is what will follow, unless you will exercise your discretion. Keep him from writing, or keep him from grumbling. You will be the saving of the boy."

"It is a great responsibility to undertake. I should not have undertaken it, had I known——"

"I am sure you have too serious a sense of the good that can be done, to shrink from responsibility," said Randolph; "but, indeed, are we not all responsible for everything we touch? If you find him too much for you, write to me. Don't write to what he calls 'home.' And do not let him be taken away without my authority. I have to protect him from injudicious kindness. A parcel of women—you know what harm they can do to a boy, petting and spoiling him. He will never be a man at all, if you don't take him in hand."

With these arguments, Randolph overcame the resistance of the schoolmaster, and with redoubled injunctions that it was himself that was to be communicated with, in case of anything

happening to Nello, went away. He was in haste to get back for his train ; and "No, no," he said, "you need not call the boy —the fewer partings the better. I don't want to upset him. Tell him I was obliged to hurry away."

And it would be impossible to describe with what relief Randolph threw himself into the clumsy shandry, to go away. He had got the boy disposed of—for the moment at least—where no harm could happen to him, but also where he could do no harm. If his grandfather regained his consciousness, and, remembering that freak of his dotage, called again for the boy, it would be out of Mary's power to spoil everything by humouring the old man, and reviving all those images which it would be much better to make an end of. And when the Squire's life was over, how much easier to take all those measures which it was so advisable to take, without the little interloper about, whom foolish people would no doubt insist on calling the heir. The heir ! Let him stay here, and get a little strength and manhood, to struggle for his rights, if he had any rights. More must be known of him than any one knew as yet, Randolph said to himself, before he, for one, would acknowledge him as the heir.

Nello was taken into Mrs. Swan's parlour, and there had some bread and butter offered to him, which he accepted with great satisfaction. The bread was dry and the butter salt, but he was hungry, which made it very agreeable.

" You'll have your tea with the rest at six," said Mrs. Swan ; and now come I'll show you where you are to sleep. What is that you're carrying ? "

" A basket," said Nello, in the mildest tone ; and she asked no further questions, but led him upstairs, not however to the little bedroom of which the child had been dreaming, where he could keep his new pet in safety, but to a long dormitory, containing about a dozen beds.

" This is yours, my little man, and you must be tidy and keep your things in order. There are no nurses here, and the boys are a bit rough ; but you will soon get used to them. Put down your things here ; this chair is yours, and that wash-stand, and——"

" Must I sleep there ?" cried Nello. It was not so much the

little bed—the close neighbourhood of the other boys—that appalled him; but where was there a window for his bird? “Mayn’t I have that bed?” he said, pointing to one which stood near the window at the end of the room.

“I daresay,” said Mrs. Swan; “why that is for the head boy, and you are the least, and the last. It is only by a chance that there is room for you at all here.”

“But I don’t want to be here,” said Nello. “Oh, mayn’t I be by the window? The head boy hasn’t got a—. What would it matter to him? but I want to be there. I want to be at the window.”

“My little master, you’ll be where I choose to place you,” said Mrs. Swan, becoming irritated. “We allow no self-will, and no rebellion here.”

“But what shall I do with my——.” Nello did not venture to name the name of the bird. He crept up to the head of the little bed which was to be allotted to him, and surveyed the blank wall tearfully. There was but a very little space between him and the next bed, and he was in the middle of the room, the darkest part of it. Nello began to cry. He called upon Mary, and upon Martuccia, in his heart. Neither of them would suffer him to be treated so. “Oh, mayn’t I go to another room where there is a window?” he cried, through his tears.

“My word, that one is a stubborn one; you will have your hands full with him,” said Mrs. Swan, leaving Nello to have his cry out, which experience had taught her was the best way. She found her husband very serious, and full of care, thinking over the charge he had received.

“It’s a gentleman’s son, not one of the commoner sort,” he said; “but why they should have brought him to me—such a little fellow—is more than I can see.”

Nello sat by his little bed and cried. His heart was full, and his little frame worn out. In the state of depression which had followed upon the delight of the morning, novelty had departed, and strangeness had come in its place—a very different matter; everything was strange wherever he turned; and no place to put his pigeon! By and by the vacant spaces would fill, and boys—boys whom he did not know—big boys, rough boys, and that

head boy, who had the window—would pour in ; and he had no place to put his bird.

Nello's tears fell like summer rain upon the precious basket, till the storm had worn itself out. Then, first symptom of amelioration, his ear was caught by the rustle of the bird in the cage. He took it up, then placed it in his lap, then opened the cover a little way, and, entrancing moment ! saw it—the glossy head, the keen little eye gleaming at him, the soft, ruffled feathers. It made a small dab at him as he peered in—and oh, how delighted, how miserable, how frightened was Nello ! He drew back from the tiny assault, then approached his head closer, and took from his pocket a bit of his bread and butter, which he had saved on purpose. Then he sat down on the floor, a small creature, scarcely visible, hidden between the beds, betraying himself only by the reverberation of the sobs which still shook his little bosom from time to time, entranced over his bird. The pigeon gurgled its soft coo, as it picked up the crumbs. The little boy, after his trouble, forgot everything but this novel delight ; a thing all his own, feeding from his hand already, looking up at him sidelong, with that glimmer of an eye, with a flutter towards him if it could but have got loose. No doubt when he set it free it would come upon his shoulder directly. Nello lost himself and all his grief in pleasure. He forgot even that he had not a window in which to hang his bird.

By and by, however, there came a rush and a tramp of feet, and eleven big boys, earthy and hot from the field where they had been working, came pouring in. They filled the room like a flood, like a whirlwind, catching Nello upon their surface as the stream would catch a straw. One of the big, hobnailed fellows stumbled over him as he sat on the floor.

" Hallo, what's here ? " he cried ; " what little kid are you ? " seizing the child by the shoulders. He did not mean any harm, but grasped the little boy's shoulder with the grip of a playful ploughman. Then there was a rush of the whole band to see what it was. The new boy ! but such a boy—a baby—a gentleman baby—a creature of a different order.

" Let's see him," they cried, tumbling over each other, while Nello, dragged to his feet, stood shrinking, confronting them,

making trial of all the manhood he possessed. He would not cry ; he drew back against his bed, and doubled his little fist, his heart heaving, his lip quivering.

"I have done no harm," said Nello, with a sob in his voice ; and the head boy called out, good-humouredly enough, though the thunder of his boyish bass sounded to Nello like the voice of doom, to "let him be."

"What's he got there ?" he asked.

The basket was snatched from the child's hand, notwithstanding his resistance. Nello gave a great cry when it was taken from him.

"Oh, my bird, my pigeon, my bird !—you are not to hurt my bird."

"Give it here," said the head boy.

But the first who had seized the treasure held it fast.

"I've got it, and I'll keep it," he cried.

"Give it here !" shouted the other.

The conflict and the cloud of big forms, and the rough voices and snatchings, filled Nello with speechless dismay. He leaned back against his bed, and watched with feelings indescribable the basket which contained his treasure pulled and dragged about from one to another. First the handle gave way, then the lid was torn off, as one after another snatched at it. Oh, why was Nello so small and weak, and the others so big and strong !

"Give it here !" shouted the head boy ; but in the midst of the scuffle, something happened which frightened them all—the bird got loose, carefully as it had been secured, flew up over their heads, fluttered for a moment, driven wild by the cloud of arms stretched out to catch it, and then, with a sweep of its wings, darted out through the open window, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CHILD FORLORN.

NELLO sobbed himself to sleep that night, scarcely conscious of the hubbub that was going on around him. He had watched with a pang unspeakable the escape of his bird, then had rushed blindly among the culprits, fighting and struggling in a passion of tears and childish rage, raining down harmless blows all around him, struggling to get out after it, to try to bring it back. Then Nello had been caught, too desperate to know who held him, in the hands of the head boy, who paid no more attention to his kicks and struggles than to his cries, and held him until, half dead with passion and misery, the poor little fellow sank exhausted, almost fainting, in the rough hands of his captors. Then the boys, who were not cruel, laid him on his bed and summoned Mrs. Swan. They all crowded round her to tell their story. Nobody had meant any harm. They had taken his basket to look at it, and the pigeon had got loose. "And it was a carrier!" the head boy said regretfully. They were as sorry as Nello could be, though by this time, under the combined influences of loneliness, desolation, homesickness, weariness, and loss, poor little Nello was almost beyond feeling the full extent of his troubles. "He's a mammy's boy," said Mrs. Swan, who was rough, but not unkind. "He has never been at school before. A spoiled child, by all I can see." But why had a spoiled child been sent here? This was what the good woman could not understand.

Nello slept and forgot his woes; and when he was awoke in the morning by the tumult, all the eleven jumping out of bed at once, performing their noisy but scanty ablutions, tossing boots about, and scrambling for clothes, the child lay trembling yet anxious, and half amused in spite of himself. The rough fun that was going on tempted Nello to laugh, though he was miserable. He shrank from them all, so big, so loud, so coarsely clothed, and in such a hurry; but he was tickled by their horse-play with each other—the hits and misses with which their missiles went and came. When the head boy was caught by a

pillow straight in the face as he approached to execute justice upon one of the laggards, Nello could not restrain a little broken chuckle, which attracted the attention of the combatants. This, however, drew upon him the arrest of fate. "I say, little one, ain't you going to get up!—bell's rung!" said his next neighbour. The head boy was aggrieved by the poor little laugh. "Get up, you lazy little beggar!" he cried. "I say, let's toss him!" cried another, with sudden perception of fun to be had easily. The boys meant no particular harm; but they made a simultaneous rush at the little trembling creature. Nello felt himself seized, he knew not for what purpose. Then the noise, and the rude, laughing faces—which looked to him in his fright like demons—all swam in giddy uncertainty round him, and the poor little fellow came down upon the floor, slipping out of their rough and careless hands, faint and sick and sore, his head turning, his little bones aching. But though in his giddiness and faintness he scarcely saw anything—even the faces turning into misty spectres—Nello's spirit survived for a moment the collapse of his little frame. He got to his feet in a frenzy, and struck out at them with his white little childish fists. "I will kill you!" cried Nello, through his teeth; and a great horse-laugh got up. But this was soon extinguished in dismay and horror when the little fellow fell back fainting. They all gathered around, horror-stricken. "Lift him on his bed," said the head boy almost in a whisper. They did not know anything about faints; they thought the child was dead. Then there was a pause. In their horror it occurred to more than one inexperienced imagination to hide the little body and run away. "What can they do to us?" said another, awe-stricken. "We didn't mean it." For a moment the boys had all that thrill of horrible sensation which ought to (but, it would seem, does not always) accompany homicide. At the end, however, humanity prevailed over villainous panic, and Mrs. Swan was called to the rescue. The boys were too glad to troop away, already subject to punishment on account of being late, and, huddling together, went down to the schoolroom in a band, where vengeance awaited them—though not for Nello's murder, as some of them thought.

Nello came to himself at last, after giving Mrs. Swan a great

deal of trouble ; and there was nothing for it but to leave him in bed all day ; for the child was bruised with the fall, aching in every limb, and too resentful and wretched to make any effort. He lay and cried and brooded, what between childish plans of vengeance and equally childish projects of escape. Oh, the pangs of impotence with which the small boy wronged contemplated the idea of those big fellows who had been so cruel to him ! How should weakness be aware that strength does not intend to be cruel ? Nello could not be tolerant, or understanding, at his age, even if there had not been his aching bones to prove the wickedness of his assailants. He hated them all. How could he help hating them ? He lay and planned what he would do to them. But Nello's dreams were not malicious. At the last moment, when they had suffered torments of dread in prospect of the punishment which he permitted them (in his fancy) to see approaching, Nello's vengeance suddenly turned into magnanimous contempt. He would not condescend to reprisals ; he would crush them with forgiveness as soon as they saw his power. Such were the plans which the child lay and concocted, and which amused him, though he was not aware of it. But when the boys came in Nello shrank to the farther side of his bed ; he would not look at them ; he would not listen to the rough inquiries. When they went away again, however, and he was left alone, a sudden fit of longing came over him. Oh, to see somebody he knew !—somebody that was kind ! Schemes of vengeance pall, like every other amusement. He gazed round upon the bare walls, the range of beds, the strange, ugly, desolate place. He could not tell if it was worse when the savages were there, filling it with noise, stumbledings of heavy feet, cries of rough voices, or when the sounds all died away, and he was left lonely, not a soul to speak to him ; no kind hand to touch his hot little head ; nobody to give him a drink, though he wanted it so much. Nello had to clamber out of bed, to pour himself out a cup of water from the great brown jug, which he could scarcely lift—and fell upon his bed again, utterly heartsick and desolate. Nobody to give him a drink ! How they used to pet him when he had a headache ! How Martuccia would croon over him, and bathe his head, and kiss

his hands, and bring him everything she could think of to please him ! And Mary would come and stand by his side, and put her cool, white hand upon his head—that hand which he had once called “as soft as snow.” Nello remembered the smile that came on Mary’s face when he had called her hand “as soft as snow.” He did not himself see the poetry of the phrase, but he thought he could feel again that mingled coolness, and softness, and whiteness. And Lily ! Lily would sit by him all day long, and read to him, or sing to him, or tell him stories, or play when he got a little better and could play. A great lump came in Nello’s throat. “Oh, my Lily !” he cried, with a lamentable cry. He had no mother to appeal to, poor child—not even the imagination of a mother. Lily had been everything. Nothing had ever been so bad with him but could be borne when Lily was there. Naturally he had not so much felt the want of Lily when it was pleasure (as he thought) that he was going to. He could part with her without much emotion in the excitement of novelty and childish hope ; but now——. Nello turned his face to the wall and sobbed. The lonely place—all the lonelier for bearing traces of that rude multitude—held him, a little atom, in its midst. Nobody heard his crying, or cared. He tore the bedclothes with his little frantic hands, with that sense of the intolerable which comes so easily to a child. But what did it matter that it was intolerable ? Little Nello, like older people, had to bear it all the same.

It was best to leave the child quiet, the Swans thought. They were not unkind, but they were not used to take much trouble. The boys who came to them generally were robust boys, able to take care of themselves, and to whom it did no harm to be hustled about—who enjoyed the scrimmages and struggles. Mrs. Swan had her own children to look after. “I’ve left him to himself ; he’s better to be quite quiet,” she said to her husband, and the husband approved ; “far better for him to be quiet.” Attempts to amuse a child, in such circumstances, would have been foolish, they thought, and as for petting and sympathising with him, far better that he should get accustomed to it, and make up his mind to put up with it like the rest. They could not make any difference between one and another ; and if he had a day’s rest,

and was allowed to lie in bed, what could the child want more? There was no imagination in the house lively enough to *envisage* the circumstances from Nello's point of view, or to understand what chills of terror, what flushes of passion, came over the child, when the others poured in to bed again in the evening, driving him desperate with fear and wild with anger. Who could imagine anything so vehement in the mind of such a little boy? But Nello was not molested that next evening; they were disposed rather to be obsequious to him, asking, in their rough way, how he was, and offering him half-eaten apples and bits of sticky sweetmeats, by way of compensation. But Nello would not listen to these clumsy overtures. He turned his face to the wall persistently, and would have nothing to say to them. Even the tumult that was going on did not tempt him to turn round, though, after the first moment of fright, the crowd in the room was rather comforting than otherwise to Nello. The sound of their voices kept him from that melancholy absorption in himself.

Next morning he had to get up, though he was still sick and sore. Nello was so obstinate in his refusal to do so, that the master himself had to be summoned. Mr. Swan would stand no nonsense.

"Get up, my boy," he said, "you'll get no good lying there. There has nothing happened to you more than happens to new boys everywhere. Come, you're not a baby to cry. Get up, and be a man."

"I want to go home," said Nello.

"I daresay you do; but you're not going home. So your plan is to make the best of it," said the schoolmaster. "Now come, I let you off yesterday; but I'll send a man to take you out of bed if you don't get up now. Come along, boy. I see you want to be a baby, as your uncle said."

"I am no baby," cried Nello, furious; but the schoolmaster only laughed.

"I give you half-an-hour," he said; and in half-an-hour, indeed, Nello, giddy and weak, managed to struggle down to the schoolroom. His watch was no longer going. He had forgotten it in the misery of the past day; it lay there dead, as Nello felt

—and his bird was flown. He stumbled downstairs, feeling as if he must fall at each step, and took his seat on the lowest bench. The lessons were not much, but Nello was not equal to them. The big figures about seemed to darken the very air to the boy—to darken it, and fill it up. He had no room to breathe. His hand shook, so that he could not write a copy, which seemed a simple matter enough. “Put him at the very bottom ; he knows nothing,” Mr. Swan said to his assistant ; and how this galled the poor little gentleman, to whom, in his feebleness, this was the only way left of proving a little superiority, what words could say ? Poor little Nello ! he cried over the copy, mingling his tears with the ink, and blurring the blurred page still more. He could not get the figures right in the simplest of sums. He was self-convicted of being not only the least, but the very last, the dunce of the school. When the others went out to play, he sat wretched in a corner of the wretched schoolroom, where there was no air to breathe. He had not energy enough to do anything or think of anything ; and it was only the sight of another boy, seated at a desk writing a letter, which put it into his head that he too might find a way of appeal against this cruelty. He could not write anything but the largest of large hands. But he tore a leaf out of the copybook, and scrawled a few lines across it. “I am verrey meeserble,” he wrote ; “Oh, Lily, ask Mary to kome and take me home.”

“Will you put it into a cover for me ?” he said to the boy who was writing, who proved to be the very head boy who reigned over Nello’s room. “Oh, please, put it into a cover. I’ll forgive you if you will,” cried Nello.

The head boy looked at him with a grin.

“ You little toad, don’t you forgive me without that ? I never meant to hurt you,” he said : but melting, he added, “ give it here.” Nello’s epistle, written across the lined paper, in big letters, did not seem to require any ceremony as a private communication. The head boy read it and laughed. “They won’t pay any attention,” he said ; “they never do. Little boys are always miserable. And won’t you catch it from Swan if he sees it !”

"It is for my sister Lily ; it is not for Mr. Swan," cried the child, upon which the head boy laughed again.

That letter never reached Penninghame. The schoolmaster read it according to his orders, and put it into the fire. He wrote himself to the address which Nello had given, to say that the little gentleman was rather homesick, but pretty well ; and that perhaps it would be better, in the circumstances, not to write to him till he had got a little settled down, and used to his new home. He hoped his little pupil would soon be able to write a decent letter ; but he feared his education had been very much neglected hitherto, Mr. Swan wrote. Thus it came to pass that Nello lived on, day after day, eagerly expecting some event which never happened. He expected, first of all, Mary to arrive in a beautiful chariot, such as was wont to appear in Lily's stories, with beautiful prancing horses—(where they were to come from, Nello never asked himself, though he was intimately acquainted with the two brown ponies and the cob, which were all the inhabitants of the Squire's stables), and with an aspect splendid, but severe, to proceed to the punishment of his adversaries. Nello did not settle what deaths they were to die ; but all was arranged except that insignificant circumstance. Mary would come ; she would punish all who had done wrong ; she would give presents to those who had been kind ; and all the boys who had laughed at little Nello would see him drive away glorious behind those horses, with their arching necks, and high-stepping, dainty feet. Then after a few days, which produced nothing, Nello settled, with a pang of visionary disappointment, that it was Mr. Pen who could come. He would not make a splendid dash up to the door like Mary in her chariot ; but still he would deliver the little captive. Another day, and Nello, coming down and down in his demands, thought it might at least be Martuccia, or perhaps Miss Brown, who would come for him. That would not be so satisfactory to his pride, for he felt that the boys would laugh and jeer at him, and say it was his nurse who had come ; but still even Miss Brown would be good to see in this strange place. At the end of the week, however, all Nello's courage fled. He thought then faintly of a letter, and watched when the postman came with packets of letters for the other boys. He

could not read writing very well ; but he could make it out if they would only write to him. Why would not they write to him ? Had they forgotten him altogether, clean forgotten him, though he had been but a week away ?

Nello did what he was told to do at school ; but he was very slow about it, being so little, and so unused to work—for which he was punished ; and he could not learn his lessons for brooding over his troubles, and wondering when *they* would come, or what they could mean ; and naturally he was punished for that too. The big boys hustled him about ; they played him a hundred tricks : they laughed at his timid, baby-washings, his carefulness, the good order to which he had been trained. To toss everything about, to do everything loudly, and noisily, and carelessly, was the religion of Mr. Swan's boys, as everything that was the reverse of this had been the religion in which Nello was trained. Poor little boy, his life was as full of care as if he had been fifty. He was sent here and there on a hundred errands ; he had impositions which he could not write, and lessons which he could not learn ; and not least, perhaps, meals which he could not eat ; and out-of-door tasks quite unsuitable for him, and which he could not perform. He was for ever toiling after something he ought to have done. He grew dirty, neglected, unkempt, miserable. He could not clean his own boots, which was one thing required of him ; but plastered himself all over with mysterious blacking, in a vain attempt to fulfil this task, he who had scarcely dressed himself till now, scarcely brushed his own hair. He kept up a struggle against all these labours, which were more cruel than those of Hercules, as long as he had the hope within him that somebody must come to deliver him ; for, with a childish jump at what he wished, he had believed that some one might come “to-morrow,” when he sent, or thought he sent, his letter away. The to-morrow pushed itself on and on, hope getting fainter, and misery stronger, yet still seemed to gleam upon him, a possibility still. “Oh, pray God send Mary,” he said, every night and morning. When a week was over, he added a more urgent cry, “Oh, pray God send *some one*, only *some one* ! Oh, pray God take me home !” the child cried. He repeated it one night aloud, in the exhaus-

tion of his disappointment, with an irrepressible moaning and crying : "Oh, pray God take me home !" He was very tired, poor little boy ; he was half wrapped in his little bit of curtain, to hide him as he said his prayers, and he had fallen half asleep while he said them, and was struggling with drowsiness, and duty, and a hope which though now falling more and more into despondency, still gave pertinacity to his prayer. He was anxious, very anxious to press this petition on God's notice. Repetition ; is not that the simplest primitive necessity of earnest supplication ? Perhaps God might not take any notice the first time, but He might the next. "Oh, take me home. Oh, pray God take me home !" God too, like Mary and the fest, seemed to pay no attention ; but God did not require written letters or directions in a legible hand : He could be approached more easily. So Nello repeated and repeated, half-asleep, yet with his little heart full of trouble, and all his cares awake, this appeal to the only One who could help him, "Oh, pray God, pray God, take me home !"

But in this trance of beseeching supplication, half asleep, half conscious, poor little Nello caught the eye of one of his room-fellows, who pointed out the spectacle to the rest. "Little beggar ! pretending to say his prayers ; and much he cares for his prayers, going to sleep in the middle of them," they said. Then one wag suggested, "Let's wake him up !" It was a very funny idea. They got his water-jug, a small enough article indeed, not capable of doing very much harm. Had poor little Nello been less sleepy in his half-dream of pathetic appeal, he must have heard the titterings and whisperings behind him ; but he was too much wrapt in that drowsy, painful abstraction, to take any notice, till all at once he started bolt upright, crying and gasping, woke up and drenched by the sudden dash of cold water over him. A shout of laughter burst from all the room, as Nello turned round frantic, and flew at the nearest of his assailants with impotent rage. What did the big fellow care for his little blows ? he lay back and laughed and did not mind, while the small creature in his drenched nightgown, his face crimson with rage, his little frame shivering, his curly locks falling about his cheeks, flew at his throat. The head boy, however, awakening to a sense of the

indiscretion, and perhaps touched by a pang of remorse at sight of the misery and fury in the child's face, got hold of Nello in his strong arms, and plucked the wet garment off him, and threw him into his bed. "Let the child alone, I tell you. I won't have him meddled with," he said to the others—and covered him up with the bedclothes. Poor little Nello! he wanted to strike at and struggle with his defender. He was wild with rage and misery. His small heart was full, and he could bear no more.

After this, however, the boys, half ashamed of themselves, got quickly to bed; and darkness, and such silence as can exist in the heavy atmosphere where twelve rustics sleep and snore, succeeded to the tumult and riot. Nello, exhausted, sobbed himself to sleep under the bedclothes; but woke up in the middle of the night to remember all his wrongs and his misery. His cup was full; even God would not pay any attention to him, and it seemed to Nello that it would be better to die than to bear this any longer. Though the dark frightened him, it was less alarming than the rough boys, the hard lessons, the pangs of longing and waiting for a deliverance which never came. He had still the sovereign which Mary gave him, and the watch he had been so proud of, though that was dead now, and he had not spirit enough left to wind it up. It was October, and the nights were long. Though it was but in reality between two and three o'clock in the morning, Nello thought it would soon be time for all these savage companions to get out of bed again, and for the noisy dreadful day to begin. He got up very quietly, trembling at every sound. There was a window at the end of the room through which the moon shone, and the light gave him a little consolation. He kept his eye fixed upon it, and groped for his clothes, and put them on very stealthily. If any one should hear him, he would be lost; but Nello's little rustlings, like a bird in the dark, what were they to break the slumbers of all those outdoor lads, who slept violently, as they did everything else! No one stirred; the snoring and the breathing drowned all the little misadventures which chilled Nello with terror, as when his boots dropt out of his hand, or the buttons on his trousers struck shrilly against the chair. Nothing happened; nobody stirred, and Nello crept out of the room, holding his

breath with the courage of despair. He got downstairs, trembling and stumbling at almost every step. When he got to the lower story, that kind moon, which had seemed to look at him through the window, almost to smile at him in encouragement and cheerful support, showed him a little window which had been left open by some chance. He clambered through and found himself in the garden. There was a great dog in front of the house, of which Nello was in mortal terror ; but here at the back there was no dog, only the kitchen garden, with the tranquil breadth of a potato-field on the other side of the hedge. It was not easy to get through that hedge ; but a small boy not quite nine years old can go through gaps which would scarcely show to the common eye. It scratched him and tore his trousers ; but there was nothing in such simple accidents to stop the little fugitive. And what it was to feel himself outside, free and safe, and all his tormentors snoring ! Nello looked up at the moon, which was mellow and mild, not white as usual, and which seemed to smile at him. The potato-field was big and black, with its long lines running to a point on either side of him ; and the whole world seemed to lie round him dark and still ; nothing stirred, except now and then a rat in the ditch, which chilled Nello with horror. Had he known it was so early, the child would have been doubly frightened ; but he felt that it was morning, not night, which encouraged him. And how big the world was ! how vast, and silent, and solitary ! only Nello, one little atom, with a small heart beating, a little pulse throbbing in the midst of that infinite quiet. The space grew vaster, the stillness more complete, the distance more visionary, and there was a deeper sable in the dark, because of Nello's little heart beating so fast, and his eyes that took everything in. What was he to do, poor little soul, there by himself in the open country, in the unknown world all in the middle of the night !

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CRISIS AT PENNINGHAME.

ALL this time the old Squire lay in the same stupor of death in life. He did not rally. Sometimes there was a look in his eyes —a quiver as of meaning, between the half-closed lids. But they could not tell what it meant, or indeed if it was anything but vague reflection of the light that would break in through a drawn curtain or raised blind. There he lay, day after day, wearing out all his nurses. If he ever slept, or ever was awake, no one could tell; but this old man, in the grip of deadly disease, lay there motionless, and tired out all the younger people who watched over him. A nurse had been got for him from the nearest town, and Mary was rarely out of the sick-chamber. Both of these attendants were worn to death as the monotonous days and nights went past; but the Squire lay just the same. They grew pale and hollow-eyed, but he apparently had stopped short at the point where he was when their vigil began.

In these circumstances all the world flocked to Penninghame to inquire for Mr. Musgrave. Rural importance shows in such circumstances. He was “by rights” the greatest man in the district, though superior wealth had come in and taken his pre-eminence from him—but everybody recollects his pretensions now. Inquiries came for him daily from every one near who could pretend to be anything. The great great people, and the small great people, the new families and the old, the clergy (who were as good as anybody), and all who sought for a place among the gentry, with whatever hope or right, all interested themselves about the invalid. “His eldest son is still living, I believe. And what will happen when Mr. Musgrave dies?” the people asked. And all who had any possibility of knowing, all who had any right to know, exerted themselves to supply answers to this question. One had it on the best authority, that John Musgrave was waiting, ready to come home, and that there would be another trial immediately. Some, on the other hand, were certain that John Musgrave never would come home at all to tempt

Providence. "There will be an effort made to pass him over, and make his little son heir instead," they said; and some believed it to be certain that the other brother would pension him off, so that the house might not be shamed by a convict squire.

Naturally, Mary knew nothing about these discussions. She spent her time in her father's room, relieving the nurse when her hours for sleep came, resting herself only when she could no longer bear up against the fatigue, seeing nobody but Mr. Pen and Lilius. Mary took little notice now of Nello's departure, and the schoolmaster's letter. It had all been done against her will, but she was too much occupied, now that it was done, to dwell upon it. It was very shameful that he was so backward, and perhaps Mr. Pen and Randolph were right in sending him to school. Her mind was too much pre-occupied for the moment to give anything but this half-angry, reluctant assent to what had been done. And perhaps it would be better *now* if Lilius could go to school too, out of this melancholy house, out of the loneliness which was so hard upon the child. But Lilius was the only consolation Mary herself had; she had grown to be part of herself during this long year. It might be doing the child injustice, as she feared; but how could she send her only companion, her consoler and sympathiser, away? As for Lilius, though she was deeply moved by Nello's departure, the want of news of him did not move her much. Her father never wrote, never communicated with the child. They had not the custom of letters. It was very dreary, no doubt, but still when he came back unexpectedly, perhaps just at the moment he was most wanted, stepping in, with all the delight of surprise added to the pleasure of again seeing the absent, that was worth waiting for. This was the philosophy of the family. It was not their habit to write letters. Lilius accepted her own loneliness with resignation, not thinking of any possible alleviation; and she watched, sitting at the door of the old hall, for every one who might come along the road. It was October—the days getting short, the air more chilly, the sun less genial. The woods began to put on robes of colour, as if the rosy sunset clouds had floated down among them. The air blew cold in her face, as she sat outside

the hall door. Martuccia within, in the background, shivered, and drew her shawl more closely across her ample shoulders. But Lilias did not feel the cold. She was looking out for some one—for papa, who might come all at once, at any time—for Mr. Geoff, who might bring news of papa—for something to come and break the monotony of this life. Something Lilias felt sure must be coming ; it could not go on like this for ever.

"Nello was always company for his sister," Mary said. Though she assented, she could not but complain. She had come out to breathe the air, and was walking up and down, Mr. Pen by her side. "It is very hard upon Lily, just at this moment, when everything is hanging in the balance, that her little brother should have been sent away."

"It would be very well," said Mr. Pen, "if you would send her away too. Nello wanted it. He would never have learned anything at home. He will come back so much improved. If he is to be received as the heir of everything——"

"If, Mr. Pen ?"

"Well ; I would not go against you for the world ; but there is truth in what Randolph says. Randolph says there must be certificates of his birth, and all that ; quite easy—quite easy to get—but where is your brother John to look after it all ? He ought to be here now."

"Yes, he ought to be here. But would it be safe for him to come, Mr. Pen ?"

"Miss Mary, I can't help wondering about that," said Mr. Pen, with troubled looks—had he grown unfaithful to John?—"if he is innocent, why shouldn't he come now ? No jury would convict——"

Mary stopped him with a motion of her hand. "Randolph has been gaining you over to his side," she said. They were walking up and down the road close to the house. Just where the great gates ought to be—if the Musgraves were ever rich enough to restore the courtyard of the old Castle—was the limit of their walk. Mary could not allow herself to be out of reach even for an hour. She was here, ready to be called, in case her father should come to any semblance of himself. "I do not say he has not some reason on his side, now that my father is—

as he is. Everything seems to have grown so much nearer. It is dreadful not to know where John is, not to be able to communicate with him. I wrote to the last place where they were living—the place the children came from—but I have never had any answer. When my poor father goes—as go he must, I suppose—what am I to do?"

"You must let Randolph manage for you. Randolph must do it. God knows, Miss Mary, I don't want to go against you——"

"But you do," she said with a half-smile. She smiled at it, but she did not like it. It is hard, even when a dog who has been your special follower turns away and follows some one else.

You never did it before since we have known each other, Mr. Pen."

Poor Mr. Pen felt the reproach. He was ready to weep himself, and looked at her with wistful, deprecating eyes; but was it not for her sake?

"I don't know what else to say to you. It breaks my heart to go against you," he said. "Whatever pleases you seems always best to me. But Randolph says—and I cannot deny it, Miss Mary, there's truth in what he says."

"Yes, there's truth in what he says. He has got the child away, and placed him out of reach, with your help, Mr. Pen; and he will push the father away, out of his just place, and make all the difficulties double. He has put you against him already that was his friend, and he will put other people against him. I begin to see what he is aiming at;" cried Mary, clasping her hands together, with indignant vehemence.

Mr. Pen did not know what to say or do to soothe her. He was full of compunction, feeling himself guilty. He to have turned against her! He felt all the horror of it to his very heart.

"We should be just to Randolph too," he said, tremulously; "he means to do what is right. And if I seem to cross you, 'tis but to serve you, Miss Mary. How could you stand in the breach, and bear all that will have to be borne? If Randolph does not come to do what has to be done, you would have to do it; and it would be more than should be put upon you."

“Have I ever shrunk from what has to be done?” she said, with again a half-smile of pained surprise.

Mr. Pen had no answer to make; he knew very well she had not failed hitherto; and in his heart he was aware that Randolph’s motives were very different from Mary’s. Still, he held with a gentle obstinacy to the lesson he had learned. It was going against her, but it was for her sake. They took one or two turns together in silence, neither saying any more. As they turned again, however, towards the house for the third time, Eastwood met them, hurrying from the door. Nurse had sent downstairs for Miss Musgrave, begging her to come without delay. The urgent message, and the man’s haste and anxious, eager looks, frightened Mary. The household generally had come to that state of expectation which welcomes any event, howsoever melancholy, as a relief to the strain of nerve and strength which long suspense produces. Eastwood was eager that there might be some change—if for the better, so much the better—but that was scarcely to be looked for—anyhow a change, a new event. The same thrill of anticipation ran through Mary’s veins. Was it come now—the moment of fate, the crisis which would affect so many? She bade Mr. Pen to follow her, with a movement of her hand. “Wait in the library,” she said, as she went upstairs.

While Mary took the air in this anxious little promenade up and down, Lilius sat at the hall door, looking out upon the road, looking far away for the something that was coming. She did not know that the rider on the pale horse was the most likely passenger to come that way. Happier visitors were in Lilius’ thoughts—her father himself to clear up everything, who would go and fetch Nello back, and put all right that was wrong; or Mr. Geoff, who was not so good, but yet very comforting, and between whom and Lilius there existed a link of secret alliance, unknown to anybody, which was sweet to the child. Lilius was looking out far upon the road, vaguely thinking of Geoff, for he was the most likely person to come—he who rode along the road so often to ask for the Squire: far more likely than her father, who was a hope rather than an expectation. She was looking far away, as is the wont of the dreamer, pursuing her hope to the

very horizon whence it might come—when suddenly, all at once, Lilias woke to the consciousness that there was some one standing near her, close to her, saying nothing, but looking at her with that intent look which wakes even a sleeper when fixed upon him, much more a dreamer, linked to common earth by the daylight, and all the sounds and touches of ordinary life. She rose to her feet with a start—frightened yet satisfied—for here was something which had happened, if not the something for which she looked. But Lilias' eyes enlarged to twice their size, and her heart gave a great jump, when she saw that the figure standing beside her was that of the old woman whom she had met in the Chase.

'Elizabeth had come up unobserved from the water-side. She was dressed exactly as she had been when Lilias saw her before, with the hood of her grey cloak over her white cap—a stately figure, notwithstanding the homely dress.

Lilias gave a cry at the sight, and ran to her. "Oh, old woman!" she cried—"oh, I want to ask you—I want to ask you so many things."

"Honeysweet!" said 'Elizabeth, with a glow in her dark eyes. She did not for the moment think either of what she had come to say, or of the risk that attended her communications with her daughter's child. She thought only of the face she saw reflected in that other face, and of the secret property she had in the child who was so beautiful and so sweet. This was 'Elizabeth's heiress, the inheritor of the beauty which the old woman had been conscious of in her own person, and still more conscious of in the person of her daughter. Lilias was the third in that fair line. Pride filled the old woman's heart, along with the warm gush of tenderness. No one had ever looked at Lilias with such passionate love and admiration. She did not venture to take the child into her arms as she had done in the solitude of the woods, but she looked at her with all her heart in her eyes.

Lilias seized her by the hand and drew her to the seat from which she had herself risen. "Come!" she said eagerly. "They say you know everything about papa—and I have a right to know; no one has so good a right to hear as I. Oh, tell me! tell me! Sit down here and rest. I once went up

the hill, far away up the hill, to go to you, but there I met Mr. Geoff. Do you know Mr. Geoff? Come, come, sit down here and tell me about papa——”

“ My darling,” said ‘Lizabeth, “ blessings on your bonnie face! but I dare not stay. Some time—soon, if it’s God’s will, you’ll hear all the like of you could understand, and you’ll get him back to enjoy his own. God bless my bairn that would give me her own seat, and think no shame of old ‘Lizabeth! That’s like my Lily,” the old woman said, with ready tears. “ But listen, honey, for this is what I came to say. You must tell the lady to send and bring back the little boy. The bairn is in trouble. I cannot tell you what kind of trouble, but she must send and bring him back. My honey, do you hear what I say?”

“ The little boy, and the lady?” said Liliias, wondering; then she exclaimed suddenly with a cry of pain, “ Nello! my little brother!” and in her eagerness caught ‘Lizabeth’s hands and drew her down upon the seat.

“ Ay, just your little brother, my honeysweet. My lad is away that would go and look after him, so you must tell the lady. No, no, I must not stay. The time will maybe come. But tell the lady, my darling. The little boy has need of her, or of you. He is too little a bairn to be away among strangers. I cannot think upon his name—nor I cannot think,” said ‘Lizabeth, with a gleam of grandmotherly disapproval, “ what my Lily could be thinking of to give a little lad such an outlandish name. But tell the lady to send and bring him home.”

“ Oh, I will go, I will go directly. Wait till I tell you what Mary says,” cried Liliias; and without pausing a moment, she rushed through the hall, her hair flying behind her, her face flushed with eagerness. The old woman stood for a moment looking after her with a smile; listening to the sound of the doors which swung behind the child in her rapid course through the passages which led to the inhabited part of the house. ‘Lizabeth stood stately yet rustic in her grey cloak, with her hands folded, and looked after Liliias with a tender smile on her face. She had nothing left to be proud of, she so proud by nature, and to whom it was the essence of life to have something

belonging to her in which she could glory. 'Lizabeth's pride had been broken down with many a blow, but it sprang up again vigorous as ever on the small argument of this child. Her beauty, her childish refinement and ladyhood, gave the old woman a pleasure more exquisite perhaps than any she had ever felt in her life. There was little in her lot now to give her pleasure. Her daughter was dead, her days full of the hideous charge which she had concealed for so many years from all the world ; and she was old, approaching the end of all things, with nothing better to hope for than that death might release her unfortunate son before herself. At this moment even a worse terror and misery was upon her ; yet as she stood there, looking after the little princess who was of her blood, her representative, yet so much above anything that had ever belonged to 'Lizabeth, there was a glow through all her veins, more warm, more sweet than any she had ever felt in her life. Pride, and love, and delight swelled in her. Her child's child—heir of her face, her voice, all the little traits of attitude and gesture, which mark individuality—and yet the young lady of the Castle, born to a life so different from hers. She stood so, gazing after Lilius till the sound of her feet and the door, closing behind her, had died away. Her heart was so full that she turned to Martuccia sitting motionless behind with her knitting. "Oh, that her life may be as sweet as her face !" she said involuntarily. Martuccia turned upon her with a smile, but shook her head and said, "Not speak Inglese." The sound of the voice called 'Lizabeth to herself. The smile faded from her face. Little had she to smile for, less than ever at this moment. She sighed, coming to herself, and turned and walked away.

Lilius ran against Mary as she entered the house at Eastwood's call. "Oh !" she cried, breathless, "Nello ! will you send for Nello ? Oh, Mary, he is in trouble, the old woman says—he is ill, or he is unhappy, or I cannot tell you what it is. Will you send for him, will you send for him, Mary ? What shall I do ? for papa will think it was my fault. Oh, Mary, Mary, send for my Nello ! Wait a moment, only wait a moment, and hear what the old woman says——"

"Speak to her, Mr. Pen," said Mary ; "I cannot stay."

She was going to her father, who must, she felt sure, want her more urgently than Lilius could. Even then it went to Mary's heart to neglect the child's appeal. "Mr. Pen will hear all about it, Lilius," she said, as she hastened upstairs. But Mr. Pen paid very little attention to what Lilius said.

"An old woman! What old woman? My dear child, you cannot expect us at such a moment as this—" said the Vicar. He was walking up and down the library with his ears open to every sound, expecting to be called to the Squire's bedside, feeling in his pocket for his prayer-book. For it seemed to Mr. Pen that the hasty summons could mean only one thing. It must be death that had come—and it would be a happy release—what else could any one say? But death, even when it is a happy release, is a serious visitor to come into a house. He has to be received with due preparation, like the potentate he is. Not without services of solemn meaning, attendants kneeling round the solemn bedside, the commendatory prayer rising from authorised lips—not without these formulas should the destroying angel be received into a Christian house. He was ready for his part, and waiting to be called; and to be interrupted at such a moment by tales of an old woman, by the grumblings of a fretful child sent to school against his will—even the gentle Mr. Pen rebelled. He would not hear what Lilius said. "Your grandfather is very ill, my dear," he told her solemnly, "very ill. In an hour or so you may have no grandfather, Lilius; he is going to appear in the presence of God——"

"Is he afraid of God, Mr. Pen?" asked Lilius with solemn eyes.

"Afraid!—you—you do not understand. It is a solemn thing—a very solemn thing," said the Vicar, "to go into God's presence! to stand before Him and answer—"

"Oh!" cried the little girl, interrupting him, "Nello is far worse, far worse. Would God do him any harm, Mr. Pen? But cruel people might do a little boy a great deal of harm. God is what takes care of us. The old gentleman will be safe, quite safe there; but my Nello! he is so little, and he never was away from me before. I always took care of him before. I said you were not to send him away, but you would not pay any attention. Oh, my Nello, my Nello, Mr. Pen!"

"Hush, Lilias, you do not know what you are speaking of. What can Nello's troubles be? Perhaps the people will not pet him as he has been petted; that will do him no harm whatever—it will be better for him. My dear, you are too little to know. Hush, and let me listen. I must be ready when I am called for. Nothing that can happen to Nello can be of so much importance as this is now."

And the Vicar went to the door to look out and listen. Lilias followed him with her anxious eyes. She was awed, but she was not afraid for the old gentleman. Would God hurt him? but anybody that was strong could hurt Nello. She made one more appeal when the Vicar had returned, hearing nothing and leaving the door ajar.

"Mr. Pen! oh, please, please, think of Nello a little! What am I to do? Papa said, 'Lily, I trust him to you—you are to take care of him.' What shall I say to papa if he comes home and asks me, 'Where is my little Nello?' Papa may come any day. That is his way, he never writes to tell us, but when he can, he comes. He might come to-day," cried Lilias. "Mr. Pen, oh, send somebody for Nello. Will you not listen to me? What should I say to papa if he came home to-day?"

"My dear little Lilias," said Mr. Pen, shaking his head mournfully, "your papa will not come to-day. Heaven knows if he will ever be able to come. You must not think it is such an easy matter. There are things which make it very difficult for him to come home; things of which you don't know——"

"Yes," said Lilias eagerly, "about the man who was killed; but papa did not do it, Mr. Pen."

Mr. Pen shook his head again. "Who has told the child?" he said. "I hope not—I hope not, Lilias; but that is what nobody knows."

"Yes," she cried, "Mr. Geoff knows; he told me. He says it was another man, and that papa went away to save him. Mr. Pen, papa may come any day."

"Who is Mr. Geoff?" said the Vicar; but he did not pay any attention to what the child was saying. There seemed to be a sound on the stairs of some one coming down. "Oh, run-away,

my dear ! run away ! Run and play, or do whatever you like. I have not time to attend to you now."

Lilias did not say a word more, or even look at him again, but walked away with a stately tread, not condescending even to turn her head towards him. In this solemn way she went back to the hall, expecting to find 'Lizabeth ; but when she found that even the old woman was gone, in whom she put a certain trust as the one person who knew everything, Lilias had a moment of black despair. What was she to do ? She stood and gazed out into vacancy—her eyes intent, her mind passionately at work. It was to her after all, and not to Mary, that Nello had been intrusted, and if nobody would think of him, or attend to him, it was she who must interfere for her brother. She stood for a minute or two fixed—then turned hastily, paying no attention to Martuccia, and went to her room. Lilias, too, had a sovereign, which Mary had given her, and something more besides. She took her money out of its repository, and put on her hat and jacket. A great resolution was in her face. She had seen at last what was the only thing to do.

"I think, ma'am, there is a change," the nurse said, as Mary noiselessly but swiftly, as long nursing teaches women to move, came into the room. The nurse was an experienced person. When Miss Brown, and even Mary herself, had seen "a change," or fancied they had seen it, before, nurse had never said so. It was the first time she had called any one to the Squire's room, or made the slightest movement of alarm. She led the way now to the bedside. The patient was lying in much the same attitude as before, but he was moving his hands restlessly, his lips were moving, and his head on the pillow. "He is saying something, but I cannot make out what it is," the nurse said. Mary put her ear close to the inarticulate mouth. How dreadful was that living prison of flesh!—living, yet dead—the spirit pent up and denied all its usual modes of utterance. Mary wrung her hands with a sense of the intolerable as she tried in vain to distinguish the words, which seemed to be repeated over and over again, though they could make nothing of them. "Cannot you help us ?—can you make it out ? Is there nothing we can do ?" she cried ; "no cordial to give him strength ?" but the nurse could

only shake her head, and the doctor when he came was equally helpless. He told Mary it was a sign of returning consciousness—which, indeed, was evident enough—but could not even say whether this promised for or against recovery. The nurse, it was clear, did not think it a good sign. He might even recover his speech *at the end*, she said. And hours passed while they waited, watching closely lest any faint beginning of sound should struggle through. The whole night was passed in this way. Mary never left the bedside. It was not that he could say anything of great importance to any one but himself. The Squire was helpless as respected his estate. It was entailed, and went to his eldest son, whether he liked it or not; and his will was made long ago, and all his affairs settled. What he had to say could not much affect any one; but of all pitiful sights, it seemed to his daughter the most pitiful, to see this old man, always so entirely master of himself, trying to make some communication which all their anxiety could not decipher. Could he be himself aware of how it was that no response was made to him?—could he realise the horror of the position?—something urgent to say, and no way of getting to the ears of those concerned, notwithstanding their most anxious attention? “No, no,” the nurse said; “he’s all in a maze; he maybe don’t even know what he’s saying;” and the constant movement and evident repetition gave favour to this idea. Mary stood by him, and looked at him, however, with a pain as great as if he had been consciously labouring on one side to express himself as she was on the other to understand him, instead of lying, as was most probable, in a feverish dream, through which some broken gleam of fancy or memory struggled. When the chilly dawn broke upon the long night, that dearest and coldest moment of a vigil, worn out with the long strain, she dropped asleep in the chair by her father’s bedside. But when she woke hurriedly, a short time after, while yet it was scarcely full day, the nurse was standing by her with a hand upon her shoulder. The woman had grasped at her to wake her. “Listen, ma’am! he says—‘the little boy,’ ” she said; Mary sprang up, shaking off her drowsiness in a moment. The old man’s face had recovered a little intelligence—a faint flush seemed to waver about his ashy

cheeks. It was some time before, even now, she could make any meaning out of the babble that came from his lips. Then by degrees she gleaned, now one word, now another. "Little boy—little Johnny; bring the little boy." She could scarcely imagine even now that there was meaning in the desire. Most likely it was but some pale reflection, through the dim awakening of the old man's mind, of the last idea that was in it. It went on, however, in one long strain of mumbled repetition—"Little Johnny—little boy." There seemed nothing else in his mind to say. The nurse laid her hand once more on Mary's arm, as she stood by her, listening. "If you can humour the poor gentleman, ma'am, you ought to do it," said the woman. She was a stranger, and did not know the story of the house.

What could Mary do? She sent out one of the servants to call Mr. Pen, who had stayed late on the previous night, always holding his book open with his finger at the place, but who got up now obedient at her summons, though his wife had not meant to let him be disturbed for hours. Then the feeble demand went on so continuously, that Mary in despair sent Miss Brown for Lilius, vaguely hoping that the presence of the one child, if not the other, might perhaps be of some use in the dim state of semi-consciousness in which her father seemed to be. Miss Brown went with hesitation and a doubtful look, which Mary was too much occupied to notice, but came back immediately to say that Miss Lilius had got up early and gone out. "Gone out!" Mary said, surprised; but she had no leisure to be disturbed about anything, her whole mind being pre-occupied. She went downstairs to Mr. Pen when he came. He had his prayer-book all ready. To dismiss the departing soul with all its credentials, with every solemnity that became such a departure, was what he thought of. He was altogether taken by surprise by Mary's hasty address—

"Mr. Pen, you must go at once and bring Nello. I cannot send a servant. He would not, perhaps, be allowed to come. If you will go, you can fetch him at once—to-morrow early."

"But, Miss Mary—"

"Don't say anything against it, Mr. Pen. He is asking for the little boy, the little boy! Nello must come, and come

directly. You would not cross him in perhaps the last thing he may ever ask for?" cried Mary, the tears of agitation and weariness coming in a sudden gush from her eyes.

"Let me send for your brother," said the Vicar. "Let me send for Randolph. He will know best what to do."

"Randolph! what has he to do with it?" she cried. "Oh go, Mr. Pen; do not vex me now."

"I will go." Mr. Pen closed his book with regret and put it into his pocket. He did not like the idea that the old Squire should depart out of the world like any common man, uncared for. After his long connection with the family, that such a thing should happen without him! Mr. Musgrave had not perhaps been so regardful as was to be desired of all the services of the Church, and Mr. Pen was all the more anxious, now that he could have everything his own way, that all should be done in order. But how could he resist Mary's will and wish? He put his book in his pocket with a sigh.

"I will do what you wish, Miss Mary; but—it is a journey of many hours—and trains may not suit. Do you think he will—go on—so long?" *

"He is asking for the little boy," said Mary, hastily. "Come and see him, and it will go to your heart. How can I tell you any more? We do not know even whether he is to live or to die."

"Ah, you must not cherish false hopes," said the Vicar, as he followed her upstairs. The servants were peeping on the staircase and at the doors; they were half disappointed, like Mr. Pen, that the "change" was not more decided. They had hoped that all was nearly over at last.

The darkened room, where the night-light was still burning though full day broke in muffled through the half-shuttered windows, was of itself very impressive to Mr. Pen, coming out of the fresh fulness of the morning light. He followed Mary, going elaborately on tiptoe round the foot of the great heavily-curtained bed. The Squire's head had been propped up a little. He had become even a little more conscious since Mary had left him. But his voice was so babbling and inarticulate that Mr. Pen, unused to it, and deeply touched by the condition in which

he saw his old friend and patron, could not make out the words—"Bring the little boy—the little boy, not Randolph—little Johnny: bring the little boy." Thus he went murmuring on, and there had gradually come a kind of wish into the face, and a kind of consciousness of their presence. "I wanted to bring Lilius, but Lilius they tell me has gone out; I cannot tell where she can have gone," Mary whispered. "And he never took any notice of Lilius—it is the boy he wants—listen, Mr. Pen, always the boy."

"I cannot make anything of it," said Mr. Pen, moved to tears.

"Oh listen! He says, 'Not Randolph, the boy!' It is the boy he wants. Look! I almost think he knows you. Oh, what is it he wants?" cried Mary.

The light which had been so nearly extinguished was leaping up in the socket. A sudden convulsion seemed to run over the old man's frame: he made an effort to raise himself. His ashen face grew red, perspiration burst out upon his forehead. Ghost-like and rigid as he was, he moved himself upward as if to get from his bed. The nurse had put herself quietly at her post on one side and she called to Mary to go to the other, while poor Mr. Pen stood by helpless, as if he were assisting at a visible resurrection. "Don't get excited, ma'am," the nurse said steadily; "one moment! I hear the doctor coming upstairs."

The steady tread of some one approaching reassured the women as they half aided, half controlled, the spasmodic force of apparent recovery. The foot came nearer and nearer, thank God. The door opened and some one came in.

It was not the doctor. It was a tall man with light hair mingled with grey and a fair complexion turned brown. He came straight into the room like one familiar with the place. Miss Brown, who stood near the door, recoiled with a quivering cry, and Mr. Pen, whom he encountered next, fell back with the same quaver of consternation in his voice. He went to where Mary stood, who alone had not looked at him, her eyes being intent on her father's face. He put her aside tenderly, taking her place. "This is my work as much as yours," he said.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NELLO'S RESCUE.

THE house was very still in the afternoon languor—all its life suspended. Between the sick-room, in which all the interest of the family existence was absorbed, and the servants' part of the house, in which life went on cheerfully enough under all circumstances, but without any intrusion into the still world above-stairs, there was nothing going on. Little Lilias went up into her own room, and down all the long staircases and passages, without meeting or seeing any one. Martuccia was in the old hall, tranquilly knitting and waiting for her young lady's return; but the house was empty of all sound or presence, nobody visible. It was like the enchanted palace through which the young prince walks, meeting no one, until he reaches the one chamber in which the secret lies. This idea passed through the mind of Lilias, pre-occupied as she was. Any one might come in—might pass from room to room, finding all deserted, until he had penetrated to the dim centre of the family life where death was hovering. She went down the oak staircase with her light foot, a little tremulous, but inspired with resolution. It was the afternoon of Nello's last day at school. He had not quite made up his mind, or been driven by childish misery, to the determination of running away when his sister set out to succour him. Had he waited, Lilias no doubt would have arrived in time to introduce a new element into the matter; but what could the little girl's arrival have effected? Who would have given any importance to that? They would have taken Lilias in, and made a little prisoner of her, and sent her back. As it was, neither knew anything of what the other was doing. Lilias had opened her most secret place, a little old-fashioned wooden box, in which she kept some special relics, little trinkets, half toys, half ornaments, which she had brought with her, and the remains of the money which her father had given her when he sent the little party away. There had been something over when they arrived, and Lilias had guarded it carefully. She took it out now, and

put the purse containing it within the bodice of her dress—the safest place. It might be wanted for Nello. He had the best right to everything ; and if he was in trouble—Lilias did not try to think what kind of trouble the little boy could be in. She took her little store, and went away with her heart beating high. This time she would herself do it ; she would not trust to any one. Mr. Geoff had undertaken to deliver her father, and stopped her ; but he had not done it. Already a long time had elapsed, and nothing had happened. She would not trust to Mr. Geoff or any one this time. If old 'Elizabeth had not gone away before Lilias returned to the hall, she had thoughts of asking the old woman to go with her ; and even a weak inclination to take Martuccia as a companion and support had crossed her mind. Martuccia would have been useless, but she would have made all the difference between a feasible expedition and an impossible one ; but perhaps it was for this very reason that Lilias rejected the idea. No ; this time she would be kept back by no advice. She would go to Nello's aid by herself. He should owe his deliverance to no one but his sister. Who could understand him so well—know so well what he must want ? And it was to her that papa had intrusted Nello. She made dismal pictures to herself of her little brother in trouble. What could "in trouble" mean ? She thought of him as out in the cold, out in the rain, crying, with no place to go to ; lost in a strange country, or perhaps ill with a fever, and nobody to sit by him, nobody to give him a drink when he wanted it, and tell him stories. What other kind of trouble was possible ? That he might not be able to learn his lessons without her to help him, and that he might perhaps be whipped—could such an atrocity be ?—just gleamed across the child's thoughts ; but it made her heart beat so with rage and indignation, and her cheeks burn with such a flush, that she thrust the idea aside ; but so long as he was unhappy, so long as he wanted her, was not that enough ? She buttoned her little coat with a stout but trembling heart, and took a shawl over her arm (was not that how travellers always provided themselves ?) and, with her sovereign in her hand for immediate expenditure, and her purse in her bosom, went down the silent stairs. How still, how deserted it seemed ! Mr. Pen came out

from the library door when he heard the step, to see who it was, but took no notice of her except a momentary glance of disappointment. Thus she went out of the house brave and resolute, yet with a tremor of the unknown in her breast.

Lilias knew what to do : to walk to Pennington, where the railway station was, and then to take a ticket, and to get into a railway carriage. The walk along the highroad was long, but it was not so overwhelming as that early expedition she had made all alone up into the hills when she had met Geoff. How glad she had been to meet him, and to hear from him that she need go no further ! Lilias had not ceased to believe in Mr. Geoff, but nothing had been done, and her heart was sick of the waiting. She did not want to meet him now ; her little heart gave a jump when she saw any one riding towards her ; but it was certain she did not want to meet Geoff, to have her mission again taken out of her hands. Nothing was more likely than that she should meet him, and her eyes travelled along the dusty line of road, somewhat wistfully looking out—in hopes not to see him—which much resembled the hope of seeing him, though it was differently expressed. And now and then a cloud of dust would rise—now and then a horseman would appear far off, skimming lightly over the long line of road, which it took Lilias so much time to get over. Once a beautiful carriage dashed past her, with the beautiful lady in it whom she had once seen, and who had kissed and cried over Nello without taking much notice of Lilias. Could it be that the beautiful lady had heard too that he was in trouble ? Lilias mended her pace and pushed on. What fancies she met with as she plodded along the road ! It was a long dusty highway, running for a little while in sight of the lake, then turning through the village, then striking across the country up and down, as even a highroad is obliged to do in the north country, where there is nothing but heights and hollows. It seemed to stretch into infinity before Lilias, mounting one brae after another, showing in a long level line here and there ; appearing on the other side of that clump of trees, beyond that far-off farmhouse, looking as if it led without pause back to the end of the world. Lilias wove one dream after another as she went along from landmark to landmark. How vivid they were ! So real, that

the child seemed to enact every scene in them as they floated through her mind ; far more real than the actual events of her life. She saw herself arriving at a great spacious place, which was Nello's school—undefined, yet lofty and wide and splendid, with marble pillars, and great colonnades and halls. She saw people coming to gaze and wonder at the little girl—the little wandering princess—who had come to seek her brother. “The girl looked at them all, and said, ‘Take me to Nello.’ The girl turned round upon them, and her lip curled with scorn.” (Lilias suited the action to the word ; and her innocent lip did curl, with what version of fine disdain it could execute.) “What did she care for all they could do for her ? ‘It is my brother I want,’ she said.” This was how she carried on her parable. Perhaps her own little figure was too much in the front of all these visions. Perhaps her own fine indifference to all blandishments and devotion to Nello was the chief principle made apparent. This was how it ran on, however, accompanying and shortening the way. She made long dialogues between herself and the master, between herself and Nello. How he clung to her ; how glad he was that she had come. “It is Lily ; I knew Lily would come,” she made him say. He would not be surprised ; he would know that this was the most natural thing. If they had locked her up in prison to keep her away from him, what would it have mattered ? Lilias would have found a way to go to him when Nello was in trouble ; and Nello knew that as well as she.

She was very tired, however, and it was dark when she arrived at Pennington. Lilias put on her grand air, but it was rather difficult to impose upon the station-master and porters. They all wanted to be very kind, to take care of her, and arrange everything for the little traveller. The station-master called her “my dear,” and wanted Lilias to go to his house, where his wife would take care of her till the morning. “You are too little to travel by the night train,” he said ; and the porters were eloquent on the wickedness of sending a little lady like this by herself. “I am going to my brother, who is ill,” Lilias said, with dignity. “And have you no mamma to go to him, my little miss ?” said the porter, friendly, yet respectful. They were all very kind. No one knew her, and they asked many questions to find out

who she was. They said to each other it was well seen she had no mother, and made Lilias's heart swell so, that she forgave them for treating her as a child, rather than as the little princess she had dreamed of being. Finally, they arranged for her that she should travel to the great junction where Nello had met Bampfylde at once—and that the guard should take care of her, and put her in the night train, which arrived at a very early hour in the morning at the station she wanted to go to. All this was arranged for her with the kindest care by these rough men. They installed her in the little waiting-room till the train should go. They came and fetched her when it was going, and placed her in her corner. "Poor little lady!" they said. Lilias was half-humiliated, half-pleased by all these attentions. She submitted to them, not able to be anything but grateful to the men who were so kind to her, yet feeling uneasily that it was not in this homely way that she meant them to be kind. They did not look up to her, but looked down upon her with compassionate tenderness, as upon a motherless little girl—a child who recalled children of their own. Just so the good woman looked upon her who got into the train along with her. "All that way, and all alone, my poor little thing?" the woman said. It hurt Lilias's pride to be called a poor little thing, but yet it was pleasant to have some one to creep close to. The world did not seem to be as it is represented in books, for nobody was unkind. Lilias was very glad to sit close to her new acquaintance, feeling comfort unspeakable in the breadth of the honest shoulder against which she leant as she travelled on in the dark. Those breadths of country which Nello had watched flying past the window were almost invisible now. Now and then a darker gloom in the air showed where the hills were high over the railway in a deep cutting. Sometimes there would be gleams of light visible here and there, which showed a village. Her companion dropped into a doze, but Lilias, leaning against her, was far too much excited for sleep. She watched the moon come out and shine over the breadth of country, reflecting itself in the little streams, and turning the houses to silver. It was late then, quite late, for the moon was on the wane. And the train was slow, stopping at every station, creeping (though when

it was in motion it seemed to fly) across the plains and valleys. It was midnight when they got to the junction, and Lilias, with her great eyes more wide awake than ever, was handed out. There were only a few lights burning, and the place looked miserable and deserted, the cold wind sweeping through it, and the two or three people who got out, and the two porters who received them, looking like ghosts in the imperfect light. The guard, who lived there, was very kind to the little girl before he went off to his house. He wanted to take her with him to make her comfortable till the morning, but Lilias could not be persuaded to wait. At last he established her in a corner, the least chilly possible, wrapping her shawl round her feet.

There she was left alone, with one lamp to bear her company, the long lines running into darkness at either side of her, blackness taking refuge in the high roof of the station, above the watchlight of that one lamp. How strange it was to sit all alone, with the chill of the air and gloom of midnight all around her! Nobody was stirring in the deserted place. The one porter had withdrawn to some warm refuge, to re-appear when the train came. But little Lilias sat alone in her corner, sole inhabitant of the big, chilly, desolate place. How her heart jumped to her mouth! What tremors and terrors at first every sigh of the wind, every creak of the lamp, gave her. But at last she perceived that nothing was going to happen, and sat still, and did not trouble except when imagination suggested to her a stealthy step, or some one behind in the darkness. How dreary it was! The night wind sang a dismal cadence in the telegraph wires, the air coursed over the deserted platforms, the dark lines of way, and blew the flames of gas about even within the inclosure of the lamp. Just then Nello was creeping, stumbling, out of the window, making his way through the prickling hedge, standing alone eyeing the moon in the potato-field. Lilias could not even see the moon in her corner. Nothing was before her but the waning gleam of that solitary lamp.

At last the train came lumbering up through the darkness, and the porters re-appeared from corners where they had been attendant. One of them came for Lily, kind as everybody had been, and put her into a carriage by herself, and showed her how she

could lie down and make herself comfortable. "You'll be there at five o'clock," the porter said. "Lie down, little miss, and get a sleep." Never in her life had Lilius been more wide awake, and there was no kind woman here with broad shoulders to lean upon and feel safe. The train swept through the night while she sat upright and gazed out with big, round, unslumbering eyes.

Lilius watched and waked through the night, counting out the hours of darkness, saying her prayers over and over, feeling herself lost in the long whirl of distance and gloom and confusing sound ; but as the night began to tremble towards the dawning, she began to doze unawares, her eyes closing in spite of herself, and much against her will ; and it was with a shiver that she woke up very wide awake, but feeling wretched, in consequence of her doze, at the little roadside station, one small house placed on the edge of a wide expanse of fields, chiefly pasture land, and with no character at all. A great belt of wood stretched to the right hand, to the left there was nothing but fields, and a long endless road dividing them, visible for miles with a little turn in it here and there, but nothing beside to break its monotony. Lilius clambered out of the carriage when she felt the jar and clang of the stoppage, and heard the name of the station drowsily called out. The man in charge of it gazed at her as though she had dropped from the clouds ; he did not even see her till the train was in motion again, creaking and swinging away into the distance. To see her standing there with her great eyes gave him a thrill of strange sensation, almost of terror. Fatigue and excitement had made her face paler than usual, and had drawn great circles round her eyes. She looked like a ghost standing there in the faint grey of the dawn, cold and trembling, yet courageous as ever. "Mr. Swan's? Oh yes, I can tell you the way to Mr. Swan's ; but you should have spoken sooner. They've been and carried off your luggage." Lilius had not strength of mind to confess that she had no luggage, and indeed was too much confused and upset by her snatch of sleep to be sure what he was saying, and stumbled forth on the road, when he showed her how to go, half-dazed, and scarcely more than half-conscious. But the pinch of the keen morning air, and the sensation of strange stillness and loneliness, soon restored her to the use of

her faculties. The benevolent railway man was loth to let her go. "It's very early, and you're very small," he said. "You're welcome to wait here, my little lady, till they send for you. Perhaps they did not expect you so early?" "Oh, it does not matter," said Liliias. "Thank you; I am quite able to walk." The man stood and watched her as she made her way in the faint light along the road. He dared not leave his post, or he would have gone with her out of sheer compassion. So young, and with such a pale little beautiful face, and all alone at such an hour of the morning, while it was still night! "It will be one of them boy-sisters," he said to himself with singular discrimination. And then he recollect ed the pale little boy who had gone to Mr. Swan's so short a time before. This gave clue to the mysterious little passenger, which set his mind at rest.

And Liliias went on along the darkling road. It was not possible to mistake the road—a long white streak upon the landscape, which was visible even in the dark; and it was not altogether dark now, but a ghostly, damp, autumnal glimmer of morning, before the sun-rising. The hedges had mists of gossamer over them, which would shine like rainbow webs when the sun rose. The fields glimmered colourless still, but growing every moment more perceptible in the chill dreariness of the season—not cold enough for frost, yet very cold. Everything was grey, the few shivering half-grown trees in the hedgerows, the sky all banked with clouds, the face of the half-seen landscape. There was one cottage by the roadside, and that was grey too, all shut up and asleep, the door closed, the windows all black. Little Liliias, the one moving atom in that great still landscape, felt afraid of it, and of herself, and the sound of her own steps, which seemed loud enough to wake a whole world of people. It seemed to Liliias that the kindly earth was dead, and she alone a little ghost, walking about its grave. None of her dreams, none of the poetry, nor anything out of her fairy lore could help her here. The reality was more than any dream. How still!—how very still it was!—how dark! and yet with that weird lightening which grew about her, making everything more visible moment by moment, as if by some strange magical clearing of her own tired eyes! She was so tired, so worn out; faint for

want of food, though she was not hungry—and for want of rest, though she did not wish to go to sleep. Such an atom in all that great grey insensible universe, and yet the only thing alive !

No—not the only thing. Lilias' heart contracted with a thrill, first of relief, then of fear, when she saw something else moving besides herself. It was in one of the great fields that stretched colourless and vast towards the horizon. Lilias could not tell what it was. It might be a spirit ; it might be an enchanted creature bound by some spell to stay there among the ploughed furrows ; it might be some mysterious wild beast, the legendary monster, of whose existence children are always ready to be convinced. She concealed herself behind a bush, and looked anxiously down the long brown furrow. It was something very little—not so big as a man—smaller even than herself ; something that toiled along with difficulty, stumbling sometimes, and falling in the soft earth. By and by a faint breath of sound began to steal towards her—very faint, yet carried far on the absolute stillness of the morning. Some one who was in trouble—some one who was *crying*. Lilias' bosom began to swell. She was very tired and confused herself ; very lonely and frightened of the dead world, and of her own forlorn livingness in it. But the sound of the feeble crying brought her back to herself. Did she divine already who it was ? She scrambled through a gap in the hedge, jumped across the ditch, and plunged too into the yielding, heavy soil of the ploughed furrow. She was not surprised. There did not seem to be anything wonderful in meeting her brother so. Had she not been sent to him because he was in trouble ? It was natural that he should be here in the cold, dim morning, in the wild field, toiling along towards her, faintly crying in the last confusion and misery of childish weariness, his way lost, and his courage lost, and all his little bewildered faculties. She called out “Nello !”—cautiously, lest any one should hear—“Nello !” and then there was an outcry of amazement and joy—“Oh, Lily !” It was a half-shriek of incredulous happiness with which poor Nello, toiling through the field, weary, lost, forlorn, and afraid, heard the familiar sound of her voice. He was not so much surprised either. He did not think it was impossible,

though nothing could have been more impossible to an elder mind. Children hold no such reckonings as we do with probability. He had been saying, "Oh, Lily ! my Lily !" to himself—crying for her—and here she was ! He had no doubt of it, made no question how she got there, but threw himself upon her with a great cry that thrilled the dim morning through and through, and made the sleep-bound world alive.

And they sat down together in the furrow, and clung to each other, and cried—for misery, but for happiness too. All seemed safe now they had found each other. The two forlorn creatures, after their sleepless, wintry night, felt a sudden beatitude creep over their little weary bodies and aching hearts. Two—how different that is from one ! They held each other fast, and kissed, and were happy in the dark furrow, which seemed big enough and dark enough to furnish them both with a grave.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BABES IN THE WOOD.

"*ARE* you very hungry, Nello ?"

"Oh, very, *very*. Are you ? I have not had any breakfast. It was night, dark night when I came away. Have you had any breakfast, Lily ?"

"How could I, when I have been in the railway all the night ? Do you think you can get over the ditch ? Jump ! I jumped, and you always could jump better than I."

"You forget everything when you go to school," said Nello, mournfully, "and I am all trembling, I cannot help it. It is so cold. Oh Lily, if they come up—if they find us—you will not let them take me back ?"

"Never, Nello ! but let us get on, let us get on to the railway. Quick, it is not far off. If you would only jump. Now give me your hand. I am cold too, but we must get over it, we *must* get over it !" said Lillas, almost crying. Poor Nello's

limbs were cramped, he was chilled to the heart. He did not feel it possible to get on, all the courage was gone out of him. He had kept up until, after scrambling through many rough places, his poor little feet had sunk in that soft, newly-ploughed furrow. This had taken all the life out of him, and perhaps his meeting with Lilias, and the tumult of joyful emotion it caused, had not increased Nello's power of endurance. He had always had the habit of trusting to her. But Lily it was quite certain could not drag him over the ditch. He made an effort at last to jump and failed, and stuck in the mud. That accident seemed at the moment to make an end of them both in their utter weariness. They mingled their tears, Lilias hanging on upon the bank above, Nello in the heavy soil below. The cry relieved them however, and by and by, by the help of his sister's hand, he managed to scramble up the bank, and get through the scattered bushes on to the highroad. One of his feet was wet and clogged with the mud, and oh, how tired they both were, fit for nothing but to lie down and cry themselves to sleep.

"Oh, Nello, if you were at home, should you ever—ever want to go away again?"

Nello did not make any reply. He was too tired for anything but a dull little sob now and then, involuntary, the mere breathing of his weakness. And the highway looked so long, longer even than the fields. There was always some hope at the end of a field that deliverance might come round the corner, but a long unchangeable highway, how endless it was! They went on thus together for a little way in silence; then: "Oh, Lily, I am so hungry," said Nello. What could she do? She was hungry too, more hungry than he was, for she had eaten nothing since the afternoon of the previous day.

"I have a shilling in my pocket, but we cannot eat a shilling," said poor Lilias.

"And I have a shilling too—more than that—I have the golden sovereign Mary gave me."

"We must just hurry—hurry to the railway, Nello, for we cannot eat money, and the railway will soon take us home; or there is a place, a big station, where we could buy a cake.

Oh!" cried Liliás, with a gleam of eager satisfaction in her eyes.

"What is it, Lily?"

"Look, only look!" She dragged him forward by the arm in her eagerness. "Oh, a few steps further, Nello—only a few steps further—look!"

The roadside cottage which had been so blank as she passed had awoke—a woman stood by the door—but the thing that caught Liliás' eye was a few stale cakes and opaque glasses with strange confectionery in them. It was these that gave strength to her wearied feet. She hurried forward, while the woman looked at the strange little pair in wonder. "Oh, will you give us a little breakfast," she said, "a little milk to drink, and some bread and butter for this little boy?"

"Where have you come from, you two children, at this hour in the morning?" cried the woman in consternation.

"Oh, we are going to the train," said Liliás. "We are obliged to go; we must get the early train, and we don't know, we don't quite know when it goes; and my poor little brother has fallen into the mud—see! and—he got his breakfast so very early before he came away that he is hungry again. We have plenty of money," cried the little girl, "plenty of money! We will give you a shilling if you will give us some milk and bread."

"A shilling—two, three shillings," said Nello, interposing. He was so hungry; and what was the good of shillings?—you could not eat them. The woman looked at them suspiciously. They were not little tramps; they were nicely dressed children, though the little boy was so muddy. She did not see what harm it could do to take them in; likewise her heart was touched by the poor little things standing there looking up at her as though she was the arbiter of their fate.

"You may come in and sit by the fire; there's no train for two hours yet. It's not six o'clock. Come in, you poor little things, and rest, and I'll give you some nice hot tea. But you must tell me all the truth, for I know you've run away from somewhere," she said.

"No," said Liliás, looking her in the face. "Oh no, I have

not run away from anywhere. My little brother was not happy, and I came to fetch him, that is all. I did not run away."

"And what sort of people was it that sent a baby like you?" said the woman. "Come in, you poor little things, and sit by the fire. What could your mother be thinking of to send you——"

"We have not got any mother." Nello took no share in this conversation. He was quite lost in the delight of the hard old settle that stood by the fire. Nestling up into the corner he thought he should like to fall asleep there, and never move any more. "We have not got any mother," Lilius said, "and who could come but me? No one. I travelled all night, and now I am going to take him home. We are children without any mother." Lilius could not but know that these words were a sure passport to any woman's heart.

"You poor little things!" the woman said, with the tears in her eyes. Whether it has its origin in the self-complacency of womankind, it is difficult to say, but whereas men are generally untouched by the unhappiness of being fatherless, women are without defence in most cases before a motherless child. Such a plea has instant recognition with high and low. No mother! —everything is pardoned, everything conceded to a creature with such a plea. She was not quite satisfied with the story, which seemed to her very improbable, but she could not refuse her succour to the motherless children. Her little shop, such as it was, had no visitors till much later in the day, when the village children went past her door to school. She had made her own tea, which stood keeping itself hot upon the hob, and she came in hastily and put out cups and saucers, and shared the hot and comfortable fluid, though it was very weak and would not have suited more fastidious palates than the children's. What life it seemed to pour into their wearied little frames! The bread was coarse and stale, but it tasted like bread from heaven. Nello in his corner of the settle began to blink and nod. He was even falling asleep, when suddenly a gig rattled past the windows. The child sprang up in a moment. "Oh, Lily, Lily!" he cried in horror, "they are after me! what shall I do?"

The woman had gone to the back of the house with the cups they had used, and so was not near to hear this revelation.

"Who is it?" cried Liliias, peering out of the window. She was restored to herself, and the name of an enemy, a pursuer, put her on her mettle. She had never encountered such a thing before, but she knew everything about it, how to behave. "Come, Nello, come," she said, "we will go out the back way while nobody is looking. Let us go away, let us go away before any one can come here."

Liliias seized some of the cakes which the woman had put in paper for them; wonderful productions, which nothing but a child's appetite could contemplate, and put down two shillings in the centre of the table. On second thoughts it seemed better to her to go out at the front and get round under cover of the hedge to the wood on the other side of the station, which appeared temptingly near, rather than incur the risk of speaking to the woman. It did not occur to her that her own presence was enough to put any one completely off the scent who was seeking Nello. She got him away out of the house successfully, and through the gap behind the hedge where was a little footpath. "Now we must run—run! We must get past, while they are asking at the station. We must not say a word to the woman or any one. Oh, Nello, run—run!" Nello, still more anxious than she was, managed to run for a little way, but only for a little way. He broke down of all places in the world opposite to the station, where Mr. Swan was standing talking to the keeper. When Nello saw him through the hedge he turned round and clasped his sister convulsively, hiding his face on her shoulder. Liliias did not dare to say a word. They were hid from view, yet any movement might betray them, or any sound. She stood with trembling limbs, bearing Nello's weight upon her shoulder, and watched through the hawthorn bush.

"Nobody has been here, not a mouse, far less a little boy. The train is not due for two hours," said the station-keeper.

"A bit of a little fellow," said Mr. Swan. "I can't think he could have got so far; more likely he's lying behind a hedge somewhere; but I thought it best to try first here."

"He's not here," the station-keeper said again. He answered

curtly, his sympathies being all with the fugitive, and he could not but give the troubled schoolmaster a corner of his mind. "It's only a month since you lost the last one," he said. "If it was my house the boys ran away from I should not like it."

"Talk of things you know something of," said Mr. Swan hotly; and then he added, shaking his head; "It is not my fault. My wife and I do everything we can, but it's those rough boys and their practical jokes."

"Little fellows, they don't seem to understand them kind of jokes," said the railway man.

Mr. Swan shook his head. It was not his fault. He was sorry, and vexed, and ashamed. "I would rather have lost the money twice over," he said. Then he turned and gave a searching glance all around. Lilius quaked, and her heart sank within her. She held her little brother close to her breast. If he should stir, if he should cry, all would be over. She knew her situation well enough. Either their enemy would go away and get bloodhounds and fierce wicked men to put on their track, during which time the fugitives would have time to get into some wonderful cave, or to be taken into some old, old house by some benevolent stranger, and so escape; or else he would come straight to the very place where they were, guided by some influence unfavourable to them. Lilius stood and held her breath. "Oh, be still, Nello, be still, he is looking!" she whispered into Nello's ear. Her limbs were nearly giving way, but she resisted fate and held out.

The schoolmaster made long inspection of all the landscape. "He was specially commended to me, too—I was warned—I was warned," he said. Then he turned to the station-keeper, giving him the most urgent injunctions. "If he comes here you will secure him at once," he said, filling Lilius with dismay, who did not see the shrug of the man's shoulders, and the look with which he turned aside. Thus their retreat was cut off, the little girl thought, with anguish indescribable; how then were they to get home? This thought was so dreadful that Lilius was not relieved as she otherwise would have been by the sound of the wheels and the horse's hoofs as the gig turned, and their enemy drove away. He had gone in his own person, but had he not left a

horrible retainer to guard the passage? And how, oh how was she to take Nello home? She did not know where the next station was. She did not know the way in this strange, desolate, unknown country. "Nello," she cried, in a whisper of despair, "we must get into that wood, it is the only thing we can do; they will not look for us there. I don't know why, but I feel sure they will not look for us there. And perhaps we shall meet some one who will take care of us. Oh, Nello, rouse up, come quick, come quick. Perhaps there may be a hermit living there, perhaps—. Come, Nello, can you not go a little further? Oh, try, try."

"Oh, Lily, I am so tired—I am so sleepy."

"I am tired too," she said, a little rush of tears coming to her eyes; and then they stumbled on together, holding each other up. The wood looked gay and bright in the early morning. The sun had come out, which warmed everything, and the bright autumn colour on the trees cheered the children as a similar hour, and the beauty of the wild creatures of the woods, cheered the poet:—

*"Si che à bene sperar m'era cagione
Di quella fera alla gaietta pelle
L'ora del tempo, e la dolce stagione."*

The trees seemed to sweep with a great luxuriance of shadow over a broad stretch of country. It must be possible to find some refuge there. There might be—a hermit, perhaps, in a little cell, who would give them nuts and some milk from his goat—or a charcoal burner, wild but kind, like those Lilias remembered to have seen in the forest with wild locks hanging over their eyes. If only no magician should be there to beguile them into his den, pretending to be kind! Thus Lilias mixed fact and fiction, her own broken remembrances of Italian woods sounding as fictitious among the English elms and beeches as the wildest visions of fancy. For this wood, though it had poetic corners in it, was traversed by the highroad, from end to end, and was as innocent of charcoal-burners as of magicians. And it turned out a great deal further off than they thought. They walked and walked, and still it lay before them, smiling in its

yellow and red, waving and beckoning in the breeze, which was less chilly now that the sun was up. The sun reached to the footpath behind the hedge, and warmed the little wayfarers through and through—that was the best thing that had happened to them—for how good it is to be warmed when one is chilled and weary ; and what a rising of hope and courage there is when the misty dawn disperses before the rising of the brave sun !

Nello almost recovered his spirits when he got within the wood. There were side-aisles even to the highroad, and deep corners in its depths where shelter could be had, and the ground was all flaked with shadow and sunshine ; and there were green glades, half visible at every side, with warm grass all lit by the sun.

“Let us go and sit down, Lily. Oh, what a pretty place to sit down ! Oh, Lily, I cannot—I cannot walk any more ; I am so tired,” cried Nello.

“I am tired too,” she said, with a quiver in her mouth, looking vainly round for some trace of the charcoal-burner or of the hermit. All was silent, sunny, fresh with the morning, but vacant as the fields. And Lilias could not be satisfied with mere rest, though she wanted it so much. “How are we to get home, if we dare not go to the railway ? and there is no other way,” she said. “Oh, Nello, it will be very nice to rest—but how are we to get home ?”

“Oh, never mind ; I am so tired,” said weary little Nello. “Look, Lily, what a warm place. It is quite dry, and a tree to lean against. Let us stay here.”

Never had a more tempting spot been seen ; green soft turf at one side of the big tree, and beech-mast, soft and dry and brown, the droppings of the trees, on the other. The foot sank in it, it was so soft, and the early sun had dried it, and the thick boughs overhead had kept off the dew. It was as soft as a bed of velvet, and the little branches waved softly over it, while the greater boughs, more still, shaded and protected the children. They sat down, utterly worn out, and Lilias took out her cakes, which they ate together with delight, though these dainties were far from delicious ; and there, propped up against each other, an arm of each round the other, Nello lying across Lilias’ lap, with

his head pillow'd upon her ; she, half-seated, half-reclining, holding him, and held in her turn by a hollow of the tree : these babes in the wood first nodded, then dozed, and woke and dozed again, and finally, the yellow leaves dropping now and then upon them like a caress of nature, the sun cherishing their little limbs, fell fast asleep in the guardianship of God.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE NEW-COMER.

Nobody in the sick-room said a word of the great consternation and wonder and fear that sprang to life in them at the appearance of the stranger. How could they, though their hearts were full of it ? when all their care and skill were wanted for the patient, who, half-conscious, struggled with them to raise himself, to get out of bed. To find out what he wanted, to satisfy the hazy anxiety in his mind, and do for him the something, whatever it was, that he was so anxious to do, was the first necessity of the moment, notwithstanding the new excitement which was wild in their veins. Where did he come from ? How had he got here ?—familiar, unmistakable, as if he had been absent but a day. How did he know he was wanted ? And was it he — really *he* — after all those dreary years ? These questions surged through the minds of all the bystanders, in an impetuous, yet secondary current. The first thing, and the most urgent, was the Squire. Brother and sister, friend and friend, had not leisure to take each other by the hand, or say a word of greeting.

Mary and her newly-arrived assistant stood side by side, touching each other, but could not speak or make even a sign of mutual recognition. *He* took her place in supporting, and at the same time, restraining the patient. *She* held her father's hand, with which he seemed to be appealing to some one, or using, in dumb show, to aid some argument.

"The little boy," he said, hoarsely, "bring me the little boy."

"Is it Nello he means?" the stranger asked, in a low voice.

"I—think so—I—suppose so," said Mary, trembling, and wholly overcome by this strange ease and familiarity, and even by the sound of the voice so long silent in this place. But he took no notice—only followed his question by another.

"Why not bring the child then? That might satisfy him. Does he care for the child, or is it only a fancy, a wandering in his head? Anyhow, let them bring him. It might be of some use."

"Do you think he—knows? Do you think he understands—and—means what he is saying?"

Mary faltered forth these words, scarcely knowing what she said, feeling that she could not explain how it was that Nello was not near—and finding it so strange, so strange to be talking thus to—John; could it be really John? After all that had sundered them, after the miseries that had passed over him, the price still set upon his head, was it he who stood so quietly, assuming his household place, taking his part in the nursing of the old man? She could not believe her senses, and how could she talk to him, calmly as the circumstances required, gently and steadily, as if he had never been away?

"Most likely not," he said; "but something has excited his fancy, and the sight of my boy might calm it. Let some one bring Nello."

He spoke with the air of one used to be obeyed, and whom also in this particular it would be easy to obey.

"We sent him to school. I am very sorry—I was against it," said Mary, trembling more and more.

Mr. Pen was frightened too. It is one thing doing "for the best" with a little unprotected parentless child, and quite a different thing to answer the child's father when he comes and asks for it. Mr. Pen paled and reddened ten times in a minute. He added, faltering—

"It was by my advice—John. I thought it was the best thing for him. You see I did not know——"

Here he broke off abruptly, in the confusion of his mind.

"Then it is needless saying any more," said the stranger, hastily, with a tone in which a little sharpness of personal disappointment and vexation seemed to mingle.

This conversation had been in an undertone, as attendants in a sick-room communicate with each other, without intermitting their special services to the patient. The Squire had been still in their hands for the moment, ceasing to struggle, apparently caught in some dim confused way by the sound of their voices. He looked about him confusedly, like a blind man, turning his head slightly, as if his powers were being restored to him, to the side on which John stood. A gleam of half-meaning, of interest, and wavering, half-roused attention, seemed to come over his face. Then he sank back gently on his pillows, struggling no longer. The paroxysm was over. The nurse withdrew her hand with a sigh of relief.

"Now," she said, "if we leave him perfectly quiet, he may get some sleep. I will call you in a moment if there is any change."

The woman saw, with her experienced eyes, that something more than could be read on the surface was in this family combination. She put them gently from the bedside, and shaded the patient's eyes from the light, for it was nearly noon by this time, and everything was brilliant outside. The corridor, however, into which they passed outside was still dark, as it was always, the glimmering pale reflections in the wainscot of the long narrow window on the staircase being its sole communication with the day.

Mary put out her hands to her brother as they emerged from the sick-room.

"Is it you—you, John?"

"Yes," he said, grasping them, "it is I. I do not wonder you are startled—I heard my father was worse—that there was a change—and came in without warning. So Nello has been sent away? May I see my little girl? You have been good to her, I am sure, Mary."

"I love her," said Mary, hastily, "as if she were my own. John, do not take my little companion away."

He had been grave enough, and but little moved hitherto by

the meeting, which was not so strange or unlooked-for to him as to them. Now his countenance beamed suddenly, lighting all over, and a tender moisture came to his eyes.

"It is what I have desired most for her," he said, and took his sister's hands again and kissed her cheek. "But send for my little Lily," he added, with an indescribable softening in his voice.

Here Miss Brown, who had been following, came out from the dusk of the room behind. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I did not like to tell you in your trouble; but I'm very uneasy about Miss Lily."

"Has she never come in yet? You said she had gone out for a walk."

"I said whatever I could think of to save you, Miss Mary. We none of us know where she's gone. I've sent everywhere. She is not at the Vicarage, nor she's not at the village; and—oh, what will Mr. John think of us?" cried the woman in tears. "Not one in the house has seen her since yesterday, and Martuccia, she's breaking her heart. She says Miss Lily has gone after her brother; she says—"

"Is Martuccia here?"

"Yes, sir," said Miss Brown, with a curtsey. She could not take her eyes off him, as she afterwards said. More serious, far more serious than when he was a young gentleman always about the house, but the same man—still the same man.

"Then send her to me at once. It is you, Martha, the same as ever," he said, with a momentary smile in the midst of his anxiety. Just as Mr. John used to do—always a kind word for everybody and a smile. She made him another curtsey, crying and smiling together.

"And glad, glad, sir, to see you come home," she said. There was this excuse for Miss Brown's lingering, that Mary had rushed off at once to find Martuccia. John bowed his head gravely. He had grown very serious. The habit of smiling was no longer his grand characteristic. He went downstairs into the library, the nearest sitting-room in his way, the door of which was standing open. Eastwood was there lingering about, pretending to put things in order, but in reality waiting for news of the old

Squire. Eastwood knew that he had not let this man in. He had not got admission in any legitimate way. "I beg your pardon, sir," he began, not altogether respectfully, with the intention of demanding what he did there.

"What?" said the stranger, looking up with a little impatience.

Eastwood drew back with another "Beg your pardon, sir!" and his tone was changed. He did not know who it was, but he dared not say anything more. This was the strangest house in the world surely, full of suspicions, full of new people who did not come in at the front door.

When Martuccia came, her story, which had been almost inarticulate in her broken English, flowed forth volubly enough to her master, whom she recognized with a shriek of delight. She gave him a clear enough account of what had happened. How an old woman had come, a peasant of the country, and told Miss Lily that her little brother was in *trouble*. This word she transferred to her narrative without attempting to translate it, so that Mary, standing by, who did not understand the rest, seemed to hear nothing but this word recurring again and again. "Trouble!" it was an' ominous word. Nothing but trouble seemed to surround them. She stood and listened anxiously, though she did not understand.

"It is clear, then," said her brother, turning to her, "that Lily has gone after her little brother, supposed to be in some mysterious trouble. When did he go, and where did he go, and who persuaded you to send him away?"

"It was Randolph—Randolph has been here. I believe he wanted to be kind. He said Nello was being ruined here, and so did Mr. Pen. It was against my will—against my wish."

"Randolph!" he said. This alarmed him more than all the rest. "Both my children! I thought I should find them safe—happy in your hands, whatever happened to me——"

"Oh John, what can I say?" cried Mary, wringing her hands. No one could be more guiltless of any unkind intention, but, as was natural, it was she who bore the blame. A man may be pardoned if he is a little unjust in such circumstances. John was ready to rush out of the house again directly to go after his children, but what could be done unless the railway helped him?

Mary got the time-tables and consulted them anxiously ; and Mr. Pen came in and stood by, very serious and a little crestfallen, as one of the authors of the blunder. And it was found, as so often happens, that nothing was to be done at the moment. The early train was going off as they talked, the next did not go till the evening, the same by which Lilius had travelled on the night before. And in the mean time, what might be happening to the little girl, who was wandering about the world in search of her brother ? While the brother and sister consulted, Mr. Pen looked sorrowfully over their heads, which were bent over these time-tables. He did not himself pretend to understand these lines of mysterious figures. He looked from one face to another to read what they meant. He was too much abashed by his own share in the misfortune to put forward his advice. But when he saw that they were both at their wits' end, Mr. Pen suggested that the place where Nello was was nearer to Randolph than to themselves, and that he might get there that night if he was informed at once, and give them news, at least let them know whether Lilius had reached the house where her brother was. "And I will go by the first train," Mr. Pen said timidly. "Let me go, as I have had a hand in it. John knows I could not mean any harm to his boy——."

Nobody had meant any harm, but the fact that the two children were both gone, and one, a girl like Lilius, wandering by herself no one knew where, was as bad as if they had meant it a hundred times over. Who could it be who had beguiled her with this story of Nello's trouble ? If John, who had suffered so much, and who had come from the country where feuds and vengeance still flourish, suspected an enemy in it, suspected even his brother who had never been his friend, who could wonder ? They telegraphed to Randolph, and to Mr. Swan, and to the stations on the way, John himself hurrying to Pennington to do so. And then when all this was done, which made an exciting bustle for a moment, there was nothing further possible but to wait till evening for the train. Such pauses are due to the very speed and superior possibilities of modern life. A post-chaise was slower than the railway, but it could be had at once, and those long and dreary hours of delay, of time which one

feels to be lost, and in which, while we wait, anything fatal may happen, are the reverse side of the medal, the attendant disadvantage upon headlong speed and annihilation of distance. What a miserable house it was during all that eternal day ! Anxieties of every kind filled their minds—those which concerned life and the living coming uppermost and shutting out the solemn interest of the chamber over which death had been hovering. The Squire slept, but only his nurse, unmoved in professional calm, watched over him ; and when he woke, still wrapped in a mist and haze of half-consciousness which subdued all his being, yet with an aspect less deathlike, Mary came and went to and from his room, in an enforced stillness almost beyond bearing, not daring to stay long in one place lest she should betray herself. She dared not allow herself to think of little Lilius, perhaps in evil hands, perhaps wandering alone. Her little Lily ! Mary felt it would be impossible to sit still, impossible to endure at all if she did not thrust away this thought. A little woman-child, at that tender age, too young for self-protection, too old for absolute impunity from harm. Mary clasped her hands tightly together and forced her thoughts into another channel. There was no lack indeed of other channels for her anxieties ; her father thus lying between life and death, and her brother with all the penalties of old on his head, going and coming without concealment, without even an attempt to disguise himself. It would have been better even for John, Mary felt instinctively, if the Squire had been visibly dying instead of rallying. What if he should wake again to full consciousness, and order the doors of his house to be closed against his son as he had done before ? What if, seeing this, and seeing him there without attempt at concealment, rejected by his own family, the old prosecution should be revived and John taken ? After that—But Mary shuddered and dropped this thread of thought also. The other, even the other was less terrible. Thus passed this miserable day.

Randolph had been alarmed even before the family were, though in a different fashion. Almost as soon as he had seated himself at his respectable clergymanly breakfast-table, after prayers and all due offices of the morning, a telegram was put

into his hand. This made his pulse beat quicker, and he called to his wife to listen, while a whole phantasmagoria of possibilities seemed to rise like a haze about the yellow envelope, ugliest of inclosures. What could it be but his father's death that was thus intimated to him—an event which must have such important issues ? When he had read it, however, he threw it on the table with an impatient "Pshaw ! The little boy, always the 'little boy,' he cried ; "I think that little boy will be the death of me." Mrs. Randolph, who had heard of this child as the most troublesome of children, gave all her sympathy to her husband, and he contented himself with another message back again, saying that he had no doubt Mr. Swan would soon find the little fugitive, who had not come to him as the schoolmaster supposed. The day, however, which had begun thus in excitement, soon had other incidents to make it memorable. Early in the afternoon other telegrams came. The one he first opened was from Mr. Pen ; this at least must be what he hoped for. But instead of telling of the Squire's death, Mr. Pen telegraphed to him an entreaty which he could not understand. "Lilias is missing too—for God's sake go at once to the school and ascertain if she is there." What did he mean—what did the old fool mean ?

"Here is another, Randolph," said his wife, composing her face into solemnity. "I fear—I fear this at least must be bad news from the Castle."

In the heat of his disappointment and impatience Randolph was as nearly as possible exclaiming in over-sincerity, "Fear !—I hope it is, with all my heart." But when he opened it he stood aghast ; his brother's name stared him in the face—"John Musgrave." How came it there—that outlawed name ? It filled him with such a hurry and ferment of agitation that he cared nothing what the message was ; he let it drop and looked up aghast in his wife's face.

"Is it so ?" she said, assuming the very tone, the right voice with which a clergyman's wife ought to speak of a death. "Alas, my poor dear husband, is it so ? is he gone indeed ?"

But Randolph forgot that he was a clergyman and all proprieties. He threw down the hideous bit of paper and jumped

to his feet and paced about the room in his excitement. "He has come, confound him!" he cried.

Not gone! that would have been nothing but good news—but this was bad indeed, something unthought of, never calculated upon; worse than any misgiving he had ever entertained. He had been uneasy about the child, the boy whom everybody would assume to be the heir; but John—that John should return—that he should be there before his father died—this combination was beyond all his fears.

After he had got over the first shock he took up the telegram to see what it was that "John Musgrave, Penninghame Castle,"—the name written out in full letters, almost with ostentation, no concealing or disguising of it, though it was a name lying under the utmost penalties of the law—had to say to him.

"*My little daughter has been decoyed away under pretence that her brother was in danger. You can reach the place to-day. I cannot. Will you serve me for once, and go and telegraph if she is safe?*" This was the communication. Randolph's breast swelled high with what he felt to be natural indignation. "I serve him! I go a hundred miles or so for his convenience. I will see him—hanged first!" Hanged—yes, that was what would happen to the fellow if he were caught, if everybody were not so weakly indulgent, so ready to defeat the law. And this was the man who ventured to bid his brother "serve him for once," treating him, Randolph, a clergyman, a person irreproachable, in this cavalier fashion. What had he to do with it if the little girl had been decoyed away? No doubt the little monkey, if all were known, was ready enough to go. He hoped in his heart they were both gone together, and would never be heard of more.

When he came as far as this, however, Randolph pulled himself up short. After all, he was not a bad man to rejoice in the afflictions of his neighbours; he only wished them out of his way, he did not wish any harm to them; and he felt that what he had just said in his heart was wicked, and might bring down a "judgment." To come the length of a wish that your neighbour may not thrive is a thing that no respectable person should allow himself to do; a little grudging of your neighbour's prosperity, a little secret satisfaction in his trouble, is a different

matter,—but articulately to wish him harm ! This brought him to himself and made him aware of his wife's eyes fixed upon him with some anxiety. She was a gentle little believing sort of woman, without any brains to speak of, and she thought dear Randolph's feelings had been too much for him. Her eyes were fixed on him with devout sympathy. How much feeling he had, though he did not speak much of it ; what strong affections he had ! Randolph paused a little to calm himself down. These all-trusting women are sometimes an exasperation unspeakable in their innocence, but still, on the other hand, a man must often make an effort not to dispel such belief. He said, " No, my dear, it is not what I thought ; my father is not dead, but suffering, which is almost worse ; and my brother whom you have heard of—who has been such a grief to us all—has come home unexpectedly."

" Oh, Randolph !" The innocent wife went to him and took his hand and caressed it. " How hard upon you ! How much for you to bear ! Two such troubles at once."

" Yes, indeed," he said, accepting her sympathy, " and the little boy whom I told you of, whom I took to school,—well, he has run away——"

" Oh, Randolph dear, what mountains of anxiety upon you ! "

" You may say so. I must go, I suppose, and look after this little wretch. Put me up something in the little portmanteau—and from thence I suppose I had better go on to Penninghame again. Who knows what trouble may follow John's most ill-advised return ? "

" And they all lean so on you," said the foolish wife. Notwithstanding these dozen years of separation between him and his family, she was able to persuade herself of this, and that he was the prop and saviour of his race. There is nothing that foolish wives will not believe.

Randolph, however, wavered in his decision after he had made up his mind to go. Why should he go, putting himself to so much trouble at John's order ? He changed his mind half a dozen times in succession. Finally, however, he did go, sending two messages back on his way, one to John, the other to Mr. Pen. To John he said : " *I am alarmed beyond measure to see*

your name. Is it safe for you to be there? Know nothing about little girl, but hear that little boy has run away from school and am going to see." Thus he planted, or meant to plant, an additional sting in his brother's breast. And as he travelled along in the afternoon, going to see after Nello, his own exasperation and resentment became so hot within him, that when he arrived at the junction, he sent a message of a very different tenor to Mr. Pen. He did not perhaps quite know what he was doing. He was furious with disappointment and annoyance and confusion, feeling himself cheated, thrust aside, put out of the place which he ought to have filled. Nello would have had harsh justice had he been brought before him at such a moment. "Little troublesome, effeminate baby, good for nothing, and now to be ruined in every way. But I wash my hands of him," Randolph said.,

CHAPTER XXXV. "

ANOTHER HELPER.

ON that same morning when so many things occurred, young Lord Stanton was seated in the library at Stanton, with a great deal of business to do. He had letters to write, he had the accounts of his agent to look over, and a hundred other very pressing matters which demanded his close attention. Perhaps it was only natural in these circumstances that Geoff should be unusually idle, and not at all disposed to tackle to his work. Generally he was so much interested in what was real work that he did it heartily, glad of the honest compulsion; but on this morning he was unsettled, and not in his usual mood of industry. He watched the leaves dropping from the trees outside, he listened idly to the sounds within; he scribbled on the margin of his accounts, now a bit of Latin verse (for Mr. Tritton was an elegant scholar), now a grotesque face, anything but the steady calculations he ought to have made. Now and then a sudden recollection of something he had read would cross his mind,

when he would get up in the middle of a letter to seek the book in which he thought it was and verify his recollection on the spot, a thing he would not have taken the trouble to do had that floating recollection had any connection with the work in which he professed to be engaged. In short, he was entirely idle, distracted, and *desœuvré*. Mr. Tritton was reading to Lady Stanton in her morning room. It was early; the household were all busy and occupied,—all except the young master of it, who could not settle to his work.

He was sitting thus when his easily distracted attention was caught by a movement outside, not like anything that could be made by bird or dog, the only two living creatures likely to be there so close to his window. It was the same window through which he had gone out the evening he made his night expedition to the hills. The sound caught his attention, as anything would have done that gave him an excuse for raising his head from the letters he was now trying to write, having given up the accounts in despair. When he saw a shadow skirt the grass, Geoff watched with eager interest for what would follow—then there was a pause, and he had bent over the letter again, thinking it a mere trick of fancy, when a sound close to him made him start and look up. Some one was standing with his back to the morning light—standing across the window-sill with one foot within the room. Geoff started to his feet with momentary alarm. “Who are you? Ah! is it Bampfylde?” he said.

“Just me, my young lord. May I come in and speak a word?”

“Certainly—come in. But why not go to the front door and come in like any one else? You do not suppose I should have shut my doors on *you*?”

“Maybe, no; but I’m not a visitor for the like of you. I’m little credit about a grand house. I’ve not come here for nothing now, but to ask *you* a service.”

“What is it, Bampfylde? If I can do anything for you I will.”

“It’s not exactly for me, but you can do it if you will, my young lord. It’s something I’m hindered from doing. It’s for the young ones at the Castle, that you know of. Both the

bairns are in trouble, so far as I can judge. I gave the little boy a carrier to let off if he wanted help. Me, and still more the old woman, we misdoubted that brother. And nigh a week ago the carrier came home, but I was away on—on a hard job, that I'm on still, and she did not understand. And when I saw her and told her yesterday what the sign was, what does the old woman do but tell the little lady—the little miss—and so far as I can hear *she's* away, the creature herself, a flower of a thing, no bigger than my arm, the very image of our Lily: her—that atom—*she's* away to deliver her brother, my young lord," said the vagrant, leaning against the window. "I'm most worn out by the same sort o' work. There's far too much of that been done among us one way and another, and *she's* away now on the same errand—to save her brother. It's laughable if you think on't," he said, with a curious gurgle in his throat of forlorn ridicule.

Geoff, who had leaned forward at the name of the children, saw that Bampfylde was very pale and worn, his clothes in less order than usual, and an air of utter weariness and harassment about him. He looked like a man who had not slept or undressed for days.

"Has anything new happened?" Geoff asked hurriedly. "Of course I will do whatever I can for the children—but tell me, first—has anything happened with you?"

"Ay, plenty," said the rough fellow with a great sigh, which was not sentiment but fatigue. "If that will not vex you, my young lord, saving your presence, I'll sit down and rest my bones while I talk to you, for I'm near dead with tiredness. *He's* given us the slip—I cannot tell you how. Many a fear we've had, but this time it's come true. Tuesday was a week he got away, the day after I'd been to see about the little lad. We thought he was but hanging about the fells in corners that none but him and me know, as he once did before, and I got him back. But it's worse than that. Lord! there's many an honest man lost on the fells in the mists, that has a wife and bairns looking to him. Would it not be more natural to take the likes of him, and let the father of a family go free? I cannot touch him, but there's no law to bind the Almighty. But all that's little to the purpose.

He's loose ranging about the country and me on his heels. I've all but had him three or four times, but he's aye given me the slip."

"But this is terrible; it is a danger for the whole country," said Geoff. "The children!" The young man shuddered, he did not realize that the children were at a distance. He thought of nothing more than perhaps an expedition among the fells for Liliias—and what if she should fall into the madman's hands? "You should have help—you should rouse the country," he said.

"I'll no do that. Please God I'll get him yet, and this will be the end," said Bampfylde solemnly. "She cannot make up her mind to it even now. She's infatuate with him. I thought it would have ended when you put your hand into the web, my young lord."

"It is my fault," said Geoff. "I should have done something more; but then Mr. Musgrave fell ill, and I have been waiting. If he dies, everything must be gone into. I was but waiting."

"I am not blaming you. She cannot bide to hear a word, and so she's been all this long time. Now and then her heart will speak for the others—them that suffer and have suffered—but it aye goes back to him. And I don't blame her neither," said Bampfylde. "Its aye her son to her, that was a gentleman and her pride." He had placed himself not on the comfortable chair which Geoff had pushed forward for him, but on the hard seat formed by the library steps, where he sat with his elbows on his knees, and his head supported in his hands, thus reposing himself upon himself. "It's good to rest," he said, with something of the garrulousness of weakness, glad in his exhaustion to stretch himself out, as it were, body and soul, and ease his mind after long silence. He almost forgot even his mission in the charm of this momentary repose. "Poor woman!" he added, pathetically; "I've never blamed her. This was her one pride, and how it has ended—if it were but ended! No," he went on after a pause, "please God there will be no harm. He's no murdering-mad, like some poor criminals that have done less harm than him. It's the solitary places he flees to, not the haunts o' men; we're brothers so far as that's counting. And I drop a word of warning as I go. I tell the folks that I hear

there's a poor creature ranging the country that is bereft of his senses, and a man after him. I'm the man," said Bampfylde, with a low laugh, "but I tell nobody that; and oh the dance he's led me!" Then rousing himself with an effort, "But I'm losing time, and you're losing time, my young lord. If you would be a help to them you should be away. Get out your horse or your trap to take you to the train."

"Where has she gone—by the train?"

"Ay—and a long road. She's away there last night, the atom, all by herself. That's our blood," said Bampfylde, with again the low laugh, which was near tears. "But I need not say our blood neither, for her father has suffered the most of all, poor gentleman—the most of all! Look here, my young lord," he said, suddenly rising up, "if I sit there longer I'll go to sleep, and forget everything; and we've no time for sleep, neither you nor me. Here's the place. There's a train at half-past eleven that gets there before dark. You cannot get back to-night; you'll have to leave word that you cannot get back to-night. And go now; go, for the love of God!"

Geoff did not hesitate; he rang the bell hastily, and ordered his dog-cart to be ready at once, and wrote two or three lines of explanation to his mother. And he ordered the servant, who stared at his strange companion, to bring some food and wine. But Bampfylde shook his head. "Not so," he said; "not so. Bit nor sup I could not take here. We that once made this house desolate, it's not for us to eat in it or drink in it. You're o'er good, o'er good, my young lord; but I'll not forget the offer," he added, the water rushing to his eyes. He stood in front of the light stretching his long limbs in the languor of exhaustion, a smile upon his face.

"You have overdone yourself, Bampfylde. You are not fit for any more exertion. What more can you do than you have done? I'll send out all the men about the house, and——"

"Nay, but I'll go to the last—as long as I can crawl. Mind you the young ones," he said; "and for all you're doing, and for your good heart, God bless you, my young lord!"

It seemed to Geoff like a dream when he found himself standing alone in the silent room among his books, with neither sight

nor sound of any one near. Bampfylde disappeared as he had come, in a moment, vanishing among the shrubberies ; and the young man found himself charged with a commission he did not understand, with a piece of dirty paper in his hand, upon which an address was rudely scrawled. What was he to do at this school, a day's journey off, about which he knew nothing ? He would have laughed at the wild errand had he not been too deeply impressed by his visitor's appearance and manner to be amused by anything thus suggested. But wild as it was, Geoff was resolved to carry it out. Even the vaguest intimation of danger to Lilius would have sufficed to rouse him, but he had scarcely taken that thought into his mind. He could think of nothing but Bampfylde, and this with a pang of sympathy and interest which he could scarcely explain to himself. As he drove along towards the Stanton station, the first from Pennington, his mind was entirely occupied with this rough fellow. Something tragic about him, in his exhaustion, in the *effusion* of his weakness, had gone to Geoff's heart. He looked eagerly for traces of him—behind every bush, in every cross-road. And to increase his anxiety, the servant who accompanied him began to entertain him with accounts of a madman who had escaped from an asylum, and who kept the country in alarm. "Has he been seen anywhere? has he harmed any one?" Geoff asked, eagerly. But there were no details to be had ; nothing but the general statement. Geoff gave the man orders to warn the gamekeepers and out-door servants, and to have him secured if possible. It was scarcely loyal perhaps to poor Bampfylde, who had trusted him. Thus he had no thought but Bampfylde in his mind when he found himself in the train, rushing along on the errand he did not understand. It was a quick train, the one express of the day ; and even at the junction there were only a few minutes to wait : very unlike the vigil that poor little Lilius had held there in the middle of night under the dreary flickering of the lamp. Geoff knew nothing of this ; but by dint of thinking he had evolved something like a just idea of the errand on which he was going. Lilius had been warned that her brother was not happy, and had gone like a little Quixote to relieve him. Geoff could even form an idea to himself of the pre-occupation of the house with the

Squire's illness, which would close all ears to Lilias' appeal about Nello's fancied unhappiness. Little nuisance! Geoff himself felt disposed to say—thinking any unhappiness that could happen to Nello of much less importance than the risk of Lilias. But he had not, of course, the least idea of Nello's flight. He arrived at the station about five o'clock in the afternoon, adding another bewilderment to the solitary official there, who had been telegraphed to from Penninghame, and already that day had been favoured by two interviews with Mr. Swan. “A young lady? I wish all young ladies were——Here's a message about her; and the schoolmaster, he's been at me, till I am sick of my life. What young lady could there be here? Do you think I'm a-hiding of her?” he cried, with that instinctive suspicion of being held responsible which is so strong in his class. Geoff however, elicited by degrees all that there was to find out, and discovered at the same time that the matter was much more serious than he supposed. The little boy had run away from school; the little girl, evidently coming to meet him, had disappeared with him. It was supposed that they must have made for the railway, as the woman in the cottage close by had confessed to having given them breakfast; but they had disappeared from her ken, so that she half-thought they had been ghost-children, with no reality in them; and though the country had been scoured everywhere, neither they, nor any trace of them, were to be found.

This was the altogether unsatisfactory ground upon which Geoff had to work,—and at five o'clock on an October afternoon there is but little time for detailed investigation of a country. His eye turned, as that of Lilias had done, to the wood. It was the place in which she would naturally take refuge. Had the wood been examined? he asked. Yes, every corner of it. Geoff was at his wits' end, and did not know what to do; he went down the road where Lilias had gone in the morning and talked to the woman, who told him a moving story of the tired pair, and declared that she would not have let them go, seeing very well that they were a little lady and gentleman, but that they had stolen away when her back was turned. Geoff stood at the cottage door gazing round him, when he saw something that no

one else had noticed, a small matter enough. Caught upon the hedge, which reached close to the cottage, there was a shred of blue—the merest rag, a few threads, nothing more—such an almost invisible indication as a savage might leave to enable his companions to track him—a thing that could be seen only by instructed eyes. Geoff's eyes were inexperienced, but they were keen : and he knew the colour of Lilius' dress, which the other searchers were not aware of. He disentangled the threads carefully from the twig. One long hair, and that too was Lilius' colour, had caught on the same thorn. This seemed to him a trace unmistakeable, notwithstanding that the woman of the cottage immediately claimed it. “ Dear, I did not know that I had torn my best blue dress,” she said, with genuine alarm. Geoff, however, left her abruptly, and followed out his clue. He hastened by the footpath behind the hedge towards the wood. It was the natural place for Lilius to be. By this time the young man had forgotten everything except the girl, who was at once a little child appealing to all his tenderest sympathies, and a little visionary princess to whom he had vowed himself. She was both in the combination of the moment—a tired child whom he could almost carry away in his arms, who would not be afraid of him, or shrink from these brotherly arms ; but, at the same time, the little mother-woman, the defender and protector of one more helpless than herself. Geoff's heart swelled with a kind of heavenly enthusiasm and love. Never could there have been a purer passion. He hurried through the wood and through the wood, searching in all its glades and dells, peering into the very hollows of the old trees. There was nothing: Was there nothing? Not a movement, not a sound, except the birds chirping, the rush of a rabbit or squirrel, the flutter of the leaves in the evening air. For it was evening by this time, that could not be denied ; the last, long, slant rays of the sun were sloping along the trunks and roots of the trees, and the mossy greenness that covered them. The day was over in which a man could work, and night—night that would chill the children to the heart, and drive them wild with fear—desolate, dark night, full of visionary terrors, and also real dangers, was coming. Geoff had made up his mind certainly that they were there. He did not think of a magician's

cave or a hermit's cell, as Lilius had done, but only whether there was some little hut anywhere, where they could have found refuge,—a hollow, unknown to him, where they might have hid themselves, not knowing a friend was near. The sun had lit up an illumination in the west, and shone through the red and yellow leaves with reflections of colour softer and more varying, but still more brilliant, than their own. The world seemed all ablaze between the two, with crimson and gold—autumn sun above, autumn foliage below. Then tone by tone and colour by colour died out from the skies, and the soft yet cold grey of the evening took possession of all. The paths of the wood seemed to grow ghostly in the gathering dusk, the colour stole out of the trees, the very sky seemed to drop lower as the night gathered in. Geoff walked about in a kind of despair. He called them, but there came no answer; he seemed to himself to poke into every corner, into the damp depths where the cold dew seemed to ooze out from the ground weighing down every leaflet. He was sure they were there. Must they spend the night in the dark, and be frozen and frightened to death before the morning? Geoff's heart was full of anxiety and pity. It seemed to him that he must stay there to keep them company, whether he could find them or not.

Then all at once he heard a sound like a low sob. It seemed to come from the ground, close to where he was standing, but he could see nothing but a little tangle of wild brambles, long branches with still a solitary berry here and there, the leaves scanty, scarlet and brown with the frost. They were all clustered about the trunk of a big tree, a little thicket, prickly and impregnable, but close to the path. And was it the breathing of the night air only, or some wild creature in the brushwood, or human respiration, that came soft, almost indistinguishable in the soft murmur of the wood? He stood still, scarcely venturing himself to breathe, so intent was he to listen; and by and by he heard the sound again. A child's sob, the soft pathetic reverberation of a sob, such as continues to come after the weeping is over. With trembling eagerness, yet caution, Geoff put aside the long tangles of the bramble which fell in a kind of arch. It was a hard piece of work, and had to be done with caution not to disturb the

poor little nestlings, if nestlings there were. There Geoff disclosed to the waning light the prettiest pathetic picture. It was not the same green hollow in which the children had first taken refuge. They had been roused by the sound of passengers through the wood, and the voices of the people who were searching for themselves, and had woke up in fright. When these noises ceased they had strayed deeper into the wood to another and safer shelter, Nello being too frightened and miserable to go on as Lilius wished. At last they had found this refuge under the bramble bushes where nobody surely could ever find them, meaning to lie there all day and creep out at night to continue their journey. Lilius had seated herself first, spreading out her skirt to protect her brother from the damp. There, lying with his head and shoulders supported on her lap, he had gone to sleep again, while Lilius waked and pondered ; very anxious, frightened too, and dissatisfied with the loss of time, she sat erect, supporting Nello, and gazed up at the dark figure in the twilight with alarmed eyes, which seemed to grow larger and larger as they shone in a passion of terror through the long tangles of the bush. Lilius had covered her brother with her shawl—she drew it over him now, covering the white little face on her arm, “What do you want with me ? I am only resting.” There is no one here to do any harm,” she said, with the sob coming again in spite of her. She thought it was the cruel schoolmaster, the more cruel uncle, who had condemned Nello to so many sufferings. She held her arms over him, protecting him—resolute not to let him be taken from her. “Oh, do not meddle with me !” she went on, growing more and more desperate. “I have some money I will give you, if you will only—only leave me alone. There is nobody—but me.”

Oh that sob ! if she could only swallow it down and talk to him, this robber chief, this Robin Hood, as if she were not afraid ! for sometimes these men are kind and do not hurt the weak. Lilius gazed, nothing but her eyes appearing, glowing through the gathering shade : then suddenly threw her brother off her lap in a transport of wild delight, “Oh Nello, Nello, Nello !” she cried, till the wood rang, “it is Mr. Geoff !” •

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

GEOFF took the children home without let or hindrance. There was no inn near where they could pass the night ; and as he had no legitimate right to their custody, and was totally unknown and very young, and might not awaken any lively faith in the bosom of authority as against the schoolmaster or the uncle, he thought it wisest to take them away at once. He managed to get some simplest food for them with difficulty—a little bread and milk—and made them lie down propped amid the cushions of a first-class carriage, which was to be hooked on to the evening train when it arrived. Before they left the little station he had the satisfaction of seeing Randolph Musgrave arrive, looking sour and sullen. Geoff did not know that Randolph had done anything unkind to the children. Certainly it was none of his fault that Lilius was there ; but what good partisan ever entered too closely into an examination of the actual rights and wrongs of a question ? Randolph might have been innocent—as indeed he was—of any downright evil intention ; but this availed him nothing. Geoff looked out of the window of his own carriage as they glided away from the station, and gazed with intensest schoolboy pleasure on the glum and sour countenance of the churlish uncle, who, but for his own intervention, might have wrought destruction to those new babes in the wood. He shivered when he thought of the two helpless creatures lying under the brambles too frightened to move, and feeling to their hearts all the fantastic horrors of the darkness. Now, though still in movement, and undergoing still further fatigue, the absolute rest which had fallen upon their childish spirits from the mere fact that he was there, touched the young man to the heart. They were willing to let him take them anywhere ; their cares were over. Nello had even made a feeble little attempt to shake his draggled plumes and swagger a little, sore and uncomfortable though he was, before he clambered into the carriage ; and Lilius lay in the nest he had made for her, looking out with eyes of measureless content

—so changed from those great, wistful, unfathomable oceans of anxiety and fear which had looked at him through the brambles! She put her hand into his as he settled himself in his corner beside her—the little soft child's hand, which he warmed in his strong clasp, and which clung to him with a hold which did not relax even in her dreams; for she went to sleep so, holding him fast, feeling the sense of safety glow over her in delicious warmth and ease. Through all the night, even when she slept, at every movement he made, her soft fingers closed more firmly upon his hand. It was the child's anchor of safety; and this clinging, conscious and unconscious, went straight to Geoff's heart. In the dark, under the waning light of the lamp overhead, he watched the little face sinking into sleep, with now a faint little smile upon it—a complete relaxation of all the strained muscles—with a sensation of happiness which was beyond words. Sometimes, for the mere pleasure of it, he would make a movement wantonly to feel the renewed clasp of the little hand and see the drowsy opening of the eyes. “Are you there, Mr. Geoff?” she said now and then, with a voice as soft (he thought) as the coo of a dove. “Yes, my Lily;” he would say, with his heart swelling in his young bosom; and Lilius would drop to sleep again, smiling at him, with sleepy eyes, in what ease and infinite content! As for Nello, he snored now and then out of very satisfaction and slumbering confidence; little snores, something between a little cherub's trumpet and the native utterance of the tenderest of little pigs—at that age when even little piggies, by reason of babyhood, have something cherubic about them too.

At midnight, at the great junction, a tall, sunburnt, anxious-faced man walked along the line of carriages, looking in with eager looks. “Are these your children?” he said to Geoff, seeing the two little figures laid up among the cushions, and not remarking how young their companion was. He spoke abruptly, but taking off his hat with an apologetic grace, which Geoff thought “foreign,” as we are all so apt to suppose unusual courtesy to be. A sudden inspiration seized the young man. He did not know who this was, but somehow he never doubted who it was the stranger sought. “They are the little Musgraves of Penninghamme,” he said, simply, “whom I am taking home.”

The tall stranger wavered for a moment, as though he might have fallen ; then, in a voice half-choked, he asked, " May I come beside you ? " He sat down in the seat opposite to Geoff. After an anxious inspection of the two little faces, now settled into profound sleep, " Thank God ! " he said. " They are all I have in the world."

Who could it be ? Geoff's ears seemed to tingle with the words—" all I have in the world." He sat in his dark corner and gazed at this strange new-comer, who was more in the light. And the new-comer gazed at him. Seeing, after a while, the child's hand clasped in his—a mark of trust which, sweet as it was, kept young Geoff in a somewhat forced attitude not comfortable for a long night journey,—" I do not know you," he said, " but my little girl seems to put her whole trust in you, and that must make me your grateful servant too."

" Then you are John Musgrave ? " cried the young man. " Oh, sir, I am glad—most glad, that you have come home ! Yes, I think she likes me ; and child or woman," cried young Geoff, clasping the little hand close with a sudden *effusion*, " I shall never care for any one else."

Serious, careworn, in peril of his life, John Musgrave laughed softly in his beard. " This is my first welcome home," he said.

Geoff found a carriage waiting for him at Stanton. His first impulse having been to take the children to his mother, he gave them up now with a pang, having first witnessed the surprise of incredulous delight with which Lilius flung herself at her waking upon her father. The cry with which she hailed him, the illumination of her face, and, Geoff felt, her utter forgetfulness of his own claims, half-vexed the young man after his uncomfortable night ; and it was with a certain pang that he gave the children up to their natural guardian. " Papa, this is Mr. Geoff," Lilius said ; " no one has ever been so kind ; and he knows about you something that nobody else knows."

John Musgrave looked up with a gleam of surprise and a faint suffusion of colour on his serious face. " Every one here knows about *me*," he said, with a sigh ; and then he turned to the young guardian of his children. " Lily's introduction is of the slightest," he said. " I don't know you, nor how you have been made to

take so much interest in them—how you knew even that they wanted help : but I am grateful to you with all my heart, all the same."

"I am Geoffrey Stanton," said the young man. He did not know how to make the announcement, but coloured high with consciousness of the pain that must be associated with his name. But it was best, he felt, to make the revelation at once. "The brother of Walter Stanton, whom——. As Lilius says, sir, I know more about you than others know. I have heard everything."

John Musgrave shook his head. "Everything ! till death steps in to one or another of the people concerned, that is what no one will ever know ; but so long as you do not shrink from me, Lord Stanton—— You are Lord Stanton ; is it not so ?"

"I am not making any idle brag," said Geoff. "I know *everything*. It was Bampfylde himself—Dick Bampfylde himself—who sent me after the children. I know the truth of it all, and I am ready to stand by you, sir, whenever and howsoever you want me——"

Geoff bent forward eagerly, holding out his hand, with a flush of earnestness and enthusiasm on his young face. Musgrave looked at him with great and serious surprise. His face darkened and lighted up, and he started slightly at the name of Bampfylde. At last, with a moment's hesitation, he took Geoff's outstretched hand, and pressed it warmly. "I dare not ask what it is you do know," he said, "but there is nothing on my hand to keep me from taking yours ; and thank you a thousand times—thank you for *them*. About everything else we can talk hereafter."

In ten minutes after Geoff was whirling along the quiet country road on his way home. It was like a dream to him that all this should have happened since he last drove between those hedge-rows, and he had the half-disappointed, half-injured feeling of one who has not carried out an adventure to its final end. He was worn out too, and excited, and he did not like giving up Lily into the hands of her father. Had it been Miss Musgrave he would have felt no difficulty. It was chilly in the early morning, and he buttoned up his coat to his chin, and put his hands in his pockets, and let his groom drive, who had evidently

something to say to him which could scarcely be kept in till they got clear of the station. Geoff had seen it so distinctly in the man's face, that he had asked at once, "Is all right at home?" But he was too tired to pay much attention to anything beyond that. When they had gone on for about a quarter of an hour, the groom himself broke the silence. "I beg your pardon, my lord——"

"What is it?" Geoff, retired into the recesses of his big coat, had been half asleep.

Then the man began an excited story. He had heard a scuffle and a struggle at a point of the road which they were about approaching when on his way to meet his master. Wild cries "not like a human being," he said, and the sound of a violent encounter. "I thought of the madman I was telling yoar lordship of yesterday." "And what was it?" cried Geoff, rousing up to instant interest; upon which the groom became apologetic.

"How could I leave my horse, my lord?—a young beast, very fresh, as your lordship knows. He'd have bolted if I'd have left him for a moment. It was all I could do, as it was, to hold him in with such cries in his ears. I sent on the first man I met. A man does not grapple with a madman unless he is obliged to——"

"But you sent the other man to do it," said Geoff, half-amused, half-angry. He sprang from the phaeton as they came to the spot which the groom pointed out. It was a little dell, the course of a streamlet, widening as it ascended, and clothed with trees. Geoff knew the spot well. About half a mile further up, on a little green plateau in the midst of the line of sheltering wood which covered these slopes, his brother's body had been found. He had been taken to see the spot with shuddering interest when he was a child, and had never forgotten the fatal place. The wood was very thick, with rank, dark, water-loving trees; and, whether it was fancy or reality, had always seemed to Geoff the most dismal spot in the county. All was quiet now, or so he thought at first. But there was no mistaking the evidence of wet, broken, and trampled grass, which showed where some deadly struggle had been. The spot was not far

from the road—about five minutes of ascent, no more—and the young man pressed on, guided by signs of the fray, and in increasing anxiety ; for almost at the first step he saw an old game-pouch thrown on the ground, which he recognised as having been worn by Bampfylde. Presently he heard, a little in advance of him, a low groan, and the sound of a sympathetic voice. “ Could you walk, with my arm to steady you ? Will you try to walk, my man ? ” Another low moaning cry followed. “ My walking’s done in this world,” said a feeble voice. Geoff hurried forward, stifling a cry of grief and pain. He had known it since he first set foot on that fatal slope. It was Bampfylde’s voice ; and presently he came in sight of the group. The sympathiser was the same labouring man, no doubt, whom his groom had sent to the rescue. Wild Bampfylde lay propped upon the mossy bank, his head supported upon a bush of heather. The stranger who stood by him had evidently washed the blood from his face and unbuttoned his shirt, which was open. There was a wound on his forehead, however, from which blood was slowly oozing, and his face was pallid as death. “ Let me be—let me be,” he said with a groan, as his kind helper tried to raise him. Then a faint glimmer of pleasure came over his ghastly face. “ Ah, my young lord ! ” he said.

“ What is it, Bampfylde ? What has happened ? Is he much hurt ? ” cried Geoff, kneeling down by his side. The man did not say anything, but shook his head. The vagrant himself smiled, with a kind of faint amusement in the mournful glimmer of his eyes.

“ Not hurt, my young gentleman ; just killed,” he said ; “ but you’re back—and they’re safe ! ”

“ Safe, Bampfylde ; and listen ! —with their father. He has come to take care of his own.”

A warmer gleam lighted up the vagrant’s face. “ John Musgrave here ! Ah, but it’s well timed,” he cried feebly. My young lord, I’m grieved but for one thing,—the old woman. Who will take care of old ’Lizabeth ? and she’s been a good woman—if it had not been her son that went between her and her wits. I’m sorry for her, poor old body ; very, very sorry for her, poor ’Lizabeth. He’ll never be taken now, my young lord.

Now he's killed me, there's none will ever take him. And so we'll all be ended, and the old woman left to die without one—without one——!”

“My cart is at the foot of the hill,” said Geoff, quickly, addressing the labourer, who stood by with tears in his eyes; “take it, and bid the groom drive as fast as the horse will go—and he's fresh—for the first doctor you can find; and bid them send an easy carriage from Stanton—quick! For every moment you save I'll give you——”

“I want no giving. What a man can do for poor Dick Bampfylde, I will,” cried the other as he rushed down the slope. The vagrant smiled feebly again.

“They're all good-hearted,” he said. “Not one of them but would do poor Dick Bampfylde a good turn; that's a pleasure, my young lord. And you—you're the best of all. Ay, let him go, it'll please you; but me, my hour's come.”

“Bampfylde, does it hurt you to speak? Can you tell me how it was?”

The poor fellow's eyes were glazing over. He made an effort, when Geoff's voice caught him as it were, and arrested the stupor. “Eh, my young lord? What needs to tell? Poor creature, he did not know me for a friend, far less a brother. And madness is strong—it's strong. Tell the old woman that—it was not *me* he killed—but—one that tried to take him. Ay—we were all playing about the beck, and her calling us to come in—all the family; him and—Lily—and me. I was always the least account—but it was me that would aye be first to answer;—and now we are all coming home—Poor old 'Lizabeth—Eh! what were you saying, my young lord?”

“Bampfylde! has he got clean off again, after this? Where is he? Can you tell me—for the sake of others if not for your own?”

“For mine!—Would it mend me to tell upon him?—Nay, nay, you'll never take him—never now—but he'll die—like the rest of us—that is what puts things square, my young lord—death!—it settles all; you'll find him some place on the green turf—we were aye a family that liked the green grass underneath us—you'll find him—as peaceable as me.”

"Oh, Bampfylde," cried Geoff, "keep up your courage a little, the men will come directly and carry you to Stanton."

"To carry me—to the kirkyard—that's my place; and put green turf over me—nothing but green turf. So long as you will be kind to old 'Lizabeth; she'll live—she's not the kind that dies—and not one of us to the fore! What did we do—we or our fathers?" said the vagrant solemnly. "But, oh, that's true, true—that's God's word: neither he did it nor his fathers—but that the works of God might be manifest. Eh, but I cannot see—I cannot see how the work of God is in it. My eyes—there's not much good in my eyes now."

Geoff kneeled beside the dying man not knowing what to do or say. Should he speak to him of religion? Should he question him about his own hard fate, that they might bring it home to the culprit? But Bampfylde was not able for either of these subjects. He was wading in the vague and misty country which is between life and death. He threw out his arms in the languor and restlessness of dying, and one of them dropped so that the fingers dipped in the little brook. This brought another gleam of faint pleasure to his pallid face.

"Water—give me some—to drink," he murmured, moving his lips. And then, as Geoff brought it to him in the hollow of a leaf, the only thing he could think of, and moistened his lips and bathed his forehead, "Thank you, Lily," he said. "That's pleasant, oh, that's pleasant. And what was it brought you here—you here?—they're all safe, the young ones—thanks to—. Eh! it's not Lily—but I thought I saw Lily; it's you, my young lord?"

"Yes, I am here—lean on me, Bampfylde. What can I do for you, what can I do?" Geoff had never seen death, and he trembled with awe and solemn reverence, far more deeply moved than the dying vagrant who was floating away on gentle waves of unconsciousness.

"Ay, Lily—d'ye hear her calling?—the house is dark, and the night's fine. But let's go to her—let's go; he was aye the last, though she likes him best." Bampfylde raised himself suddenly with a half-convulsive movement. "Poor 'Lizabeth!—poor old 'Lizabeth—all gone—all gone!" he said.

And what an hour Geoff spent supporting the poor head and moistening the dry lips of the man who was dead, yet could not die! He did not know there had been such struggles in the world.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A TRAITOR.

MR. PENNITHORNE was at the Castle almost all the day during which so many things occurred. While the children wandered in the wood and young Lord Stanton went in search of them, the Vicar could not leave the centre of anxiety. There was no possibility of going upon that quest till the evening, and good Mr. Pen thought it his bounden duty to stay with John to "take off his attention," to distract his mind if possible from the object of his anxieties. It was all John Musgrave could do, by way of consideration for an old friend, to put up with these attentions, but he managed to do so without betraying his impatience, and Mr. Pen thought he had performed the first duty of friendship. He suggested everything he could think of that might have happened; most of his suggestions going to prove that Lilius was in very great peril indeed, though she might be saved by various ingenious ways. And he took Mary aside and shook his head, and said he was afraid it was a very bad business. He believed, good man, that he was of the greatest use to them both, and congratulated himself on having stayed to discharge this Christian duty. But Mrs. Pen at the Vicarage got cross and nervous, and did not think her husband was doing his duty to his home. When a telegram came in the afternoon, she was not only curious but frightened—for telegrams she thought were always messages of evil. What could it tell but harm? Perhaps that her father had been taken ill (Mr. Pen himself had no family, nor anybody to speak of belonging to him); perhaps that the investment had gone wrong in which all their little money was. She tore it open in great agitation, and read as follows:—

"John Musgrave is in the county and near you. Do you

.remember what is your duty as a magistrate, and what is the penalty of not performing it?"

Mrs. Pen read this alarming missive two or three times over before she could understand what it meant. John Musgrave! By degrees it became clear to her. This was why her husband deserted her, and spent his whole day at the Castle. He a magistrate, whose first duty it was to send John Musgrave to prison. The penalty—what was the penalty? The poor woman was in such a frenzy of agitation and terror that she did not know what to believe. What could they do to him if it was found out? She went to the window and looked for him; she went out and walked to the garden gate; she was not able to keep still. The penalty—what was it? Could they put him in prison instead of the criminal he allowed to go free? That seemed the most natural thing, and imagination conjured up before her the dreadful scene of Mr. Pen's arrest, perhaps when he was going to church, perhaps when the house was full of people—everybody seeing—everybody knowing it. Mrs. Pen saw her husband dragged along the road in handcuffs before she came to an end of her imaginations. Was there nothing she could do to save him? She was ready to put herself in the breach, to say, like a heroine, "Take me, and let him go free?" but it did not appear to her likely that the myrmidons of the law would pay any attention to such a touching interposition. Then it occurred to her to look who it was, a thing she had not noticed at first, who had sent this kind warning. But this alarmed her more and more. It was some one who called himself "Friend," who had taken the trouble from a distant place in the midland counties to telegraph thus to Mr. Pennithorne. A friend—it was then an anonymous warning, a very alarming thing indeed to the vulgar mind. Mrs. Pen worked herself up into a state of intense nervous agitation. She sent for the gardener that she might send him at once to the Castle for her husband. But before he came another train of reflections came across her mind. John Musgrave was her William's friend. He was devoted to the family generally, and to this member of it in particular. Was he not capable of going to prison—of letting himself be handcuffed and dragged along the public road, and cast into a dungeon,

rather than give up his friend to justice? Oh, what could the poor woman do? If she could but take some step—do something to save him before he knew.

All at once there occurred to Mrs. Pen a plan of action which would put everything right—save William in spite of himself, and without his knowledge, and put John Musgrave in the hands of justice without any action of his which could be supposed unfriendly. She herself, Mrs. Pen, did not even know John, so that if she betrayed him it would be nothing unkind, nobody could blame her, not Mary Musgrave herself. When the gardener came, instead of sending him to the Castle for her husband, she sent him to the village to order the fly in which she occasionally paid visits; and she put on her best clothes with a quiver of anxiety and terror in her heart. She put the telegram in her pocket, and drove away—with a half-satisfaction in her own appearance and half-pride in bidding the man drive to Elfdale, to Sir Henry Stanton's, mingling with the real anxiety in her heart. She was frightened too at what she was about to do—but nobody could expect from her any consideration for John Musgrave, whom she had never seen; whereas, to save her husband from the consequences of his foolish faithfulness, was not that the evident and first duty of a wife? It was a long drive, and she had many misgivings as she drove along, with plenty of time to consider and reconsider all the arguments she had already gone over; but yet when she got to Elfdale she did not seem to have had any time to think at all. She was hurried in, before she knew, to Sir Henry Stanton's presence. He was the nearest magistrate of any importance, and Mrs. Pen had a slight visiting acquaintance, of which she was very proud, with Lady Stanton. Had she repented at the last of her mission, she could always make out to herself that it was Lady Stanton she had come to visit. But it was Sir Henry whom she asked for, alarm for her husband at the last moment getting the better of her fears.

Sir Henry received her with a great deal of surprise. What could the little country clergyman's wife want with him? But he was still more surprised when he heard her errand. John Musgrave at home!—within reach—daring justice—defying the

law ! His wife had told him of some supposed discovery which she at least imagined likely to clear Musgrave, by bringing in another possible criminal, but that must be some merely nonsensical theory he had no doubt, such as women and boys are apt to indulge :—for if anything could be worse than women, Sir Henry felt it was boys inspired by women, and carrying out their fancies. Therefore he had paid very little regard to what his wife said. Mrs. Pennithorne had the advantage of rousing him into excitement. What ! come back !—daring justice to touch him —insulting the family of the man he had killed, and the laws of the country ! Sir Henry fumed at the audacity, the evident absence of all remorse or compunction. “ He must be a shameless, heartless ruffian,” he said ; and then he looked at the harmless little woman who had brought him this news. “ It is very public-spirited to bestir yourself in the matter,” he said. “ Have you seen the man, Mrs. Pennithorne, or how have you come to know ? ”

“ I have not seen him, Sir Henry. I don’t know anything about him, therefore nobody could say that it was unkind in *me*. How can you have any feeling for a person you never saw ? I got—the news—to-day when my husband was at the Castle—*he* did not tell me—he has nothing to do with it. He is a great friend of the Musgraves, Sir Henry ; and I was told if he knew and did not tell it would bring him into trouble ; so I came to you. I thought it was a wife’s duty. I did not wait till he came in to show him the telegram, but I came straight on to you.”

“ Then you got a telegram ? ”

“ Did I say a telegram ? ” she said, frightened. “ Oh—I did not think what I was saying. But why should I conceal it ? Yes, indeed, Sir Henry, this afternoon there came a telegram. I have never had a moment’s peace since then. I thought at first I would send for him and see what he would do, but then I thought—he thinks so much of the Musgraves—no doubt it would be a trouble to him to go against them ; and so I thought before he came in I would come to you. I would not do anything without consulting my husband in any ordinary way, indeed, • I assure you, Sir Henry. I am not a woman of that kind ;

but in a thing that might have brought him into such trouble——”

“And is that telegram all you know, Mrs. Pennithorne?”

A horrible dread that he was going to disapprove of her, instead of commending her, ran through her mind.

“It is all,” she said, faltering; “I have it in my pocket.”

To show the telegram was the last thing in her mind, yet she produced it now in impetuous self-defence. Having made such a sacrifice as she had done, acted on her own authority, incurred the expense of the fly, absented herself from home without anybody’s knowledge (though William was far too much wrapped up in the Musgraves to be aware of that), it was more than Mrs. Pennithorne could bear to have her motives thus unappreciated. She held out the telegram without pausing to think. He took it, and read it, with a curious look on his face. Sir Henry took a low view of wives, and of women in general. If she belonged to him how he would put her down, this meddling woman! but he was glad to learn what she had to tell, and to be able to act upon it. To approve of your informant and to use the information obtained are two very different things.

“This is a threat,” he said; “this is a very curious communication, Mrs. Pennithorne. Do you know who sent it? Friend! Is it a friend in the abstract, or does your husband know any one of the name?”

“I don’t know who it is. Oh no, Sir Henry. William knows no one—no one whom I don’t know! His friends are my friends. My husband is the best of men. He has not a secret from me. If I may seem to be acting behind his back it is only to save him, Sir Henry—only for his good.”

“You are acting in the most public-spirited way, Mrs. Pennithorne; but it is very strange, and I wonder who could have sent it. Do you know any one at this place?”

“Nobody,” she said, composing herself, yet not quite satisfied either, for public-spirited was but a poor sort of praise. She was conscious that she was betraying her husband as well as John Musgrave, and nothing but distinct applause and assurance that she had saved her William could have put her conscience quite at ease.

"It is very odd—very odd," he said ; "but I am very much obliged to you for bringing this information to me, and I shall lose no time in acting upon it. For a long time, a very long time, this man has evaded the law ; but it will not do to defy it—it never does to defy it. He shall find that it is more watchful than he thought."

"And, Sir Henry, of course it is of my husband I must think first. You will not say he knew ? You will not let him get into trouble about it !—a clergyman, a man whom every one looks up to ! You will save him from the penalty, Sir Henry ? Indeed I have no reason to believe he knew at all ; he has never seen this thing. I don't suppose he knows at all. But he might be so easily got into trouble ! Oh, Sir Henry ! you will not let them bring in William's name ?"

"I shall take care that Mr. Pennithorne is not mentioned at all," he said, with a polite bow ; but he did not add, "You are a heroic woman and you have saved your husband," which was the thing poor Mrs. Pen wanted to support her. She put back her telegram in her pocket very humbly, and rose up, feeling herself more a culprit than a heroine, to go away. At this moment Lady Stanton herself came in hurriedly.

"I heard Mrs. Pennithorne was here," she said, with a half-apology to her husband, "and I thought I might come and ask what was the last news from Penninghame—if there was any change. I am not interrupting—business ?"

"No ; you will be interested in the news Mrs. Pennithorne brings me," said Sir Henry, with a certain satisfaction. "Mr. Musgrave's son John, in whom you have always shown so much interest, Walter Stanton's murderer——"

"No, no," she said, with a shudder, folding her hands instinctively ; "no, no !" The colour went out of her very lips. She was about to hear that he had died. He must have died on the very day she saw him. She listened, looking at her husband all pale and awe-stricken, with a gasp in her throat.

—"Is here," said Sir Henry, deliberately. "Here, where it was done, defying the law."

Mary uttered a great cry of mingled relief and despair.

"Then it was he—it was he—and no ghost!" she cried.

"What! you knew and never told me? I am not so happy in my wife," said Sir Henry, with a threatening smile, "as Mr. Pennithorne."

"Oh, was it he—was it he!—no spirit—but himself? God help him," cried Lady Stanton, with sudden tears. "No, I could not have told you, for I thought it was an apparition. And I would not, Henry," she added with a kind of generous passion, "I would not, if I could. How could I betray an innocent man?"

"Happily Mrs. Pennithorne has saved you the trouble," he said, getting up impatiently from his seat. He resented his wife's silence, but he scorned the other woman who had brought him the news. "Do not let me disturb you, ladies, but this is too important for delay. The warrant must be out to-night. I trust to your honour, or I might arrest you both," he said with a sneer—"two fair prisoners—lest you should warn the man and defeat justice again."

"Henry, you are not going to arrest him—to *arrest* him—after what I told you? I told you that Geoff——"

"Geoff! send Geoff to your nursery, to play with your children, Lady Stanton," he cried, in rising wrath, "rather than make a puppet of him to carry out your own ideas. I have had enough of boys' nonsense and women's. Go to your tea-table, my lady, and leave me to manage my own concerns."

Then Lady Stanton—was it not natural!—with a white, self-contained passion, turned upon the other commonplace woman by her side, who stood trembling before the angry man, yet siding with him in her heart, as such women do.

"And is it you that have betrayed him?" she cried; "do you know that your husband owes everything to him—everything? Oh, it cannot be Mr. Pen's doing—he loved them all too well. If it is you, how will you bear to have his blood on your head? God knows what they may prove against him, or what they may do to him; but whatever it is, it will be a lie, and his blood will be on your head. Oh, how could you, a woman, betray an innocent man?"

Lady Stanton's passion, Sir Henry's lowering countenance, the sudden atmosphere of tragedy in which she found herself, were

, too much for poor Mrs. Pen. She burst into hysterical crying, and dropped down upon the floor between these two excited people. Perhaps it was as good a way as any other of extricating herself out of the most difficult position in which a poor little, well-intentioned clergywoman had ever been.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MOTHER.

THE afternoon of the day on which poor Bampfylde died was bright and fine, one of those beautiful October days which are more lovely in their wistful brightness, more touching, than any other period of the year—Summer still lingering, the smile on her lip and the tear in her eye, dressed out in borrowed splendour, her own fair garniture of flowers and greenery worn out, but wearing her Indian mantle with a tender grace, subdued and sweet. The late mignonette over-blown, yet fragrant, was sweet in the little village gardens, underneath the pale China roses that still kept up a little glow of blossom. Something had excited the village ; the people were at their doors, and gathered in groups about. Miss Price, the dressmaker, held a little court. There was evidently something to tell, something to talk over more than was usual. The few passengers who were about stayed to hear, and each little knot of people which had managed to secure a new listener was happy. They were all in full tide of talk, commenting upon and discussing some occurrence with a certain hush, at the same time, of awe about them, which showed that the news was not of a joyful character—when some one came down through the village whose appearance raised the excitement to fever point. It was the well-known figure of the old woman in her grey cloak—so well known up the water and down the water, which thus suddenly appeared among them—old 'Lizabeth Bampfylde ! The gossips shrank closer together, and gazed at her, with eager curiosity all, with sympathy some. They drew away

from her path with a feeling which was half reverence and half fear. "Does she know—do you think she knows?" some of them asked; and exclamations of, "Poor old body—poor woman," were ripe among the kind-hearted; but all under their breath. Elizabeth took no notice of the people in her path; perhaps she did not even see them. She was warm with her long walk from the fells, and had thrown off her hood and knotted her red handkerchief over her cap. She went along thus with the long swing of her still vigorous limbs, stately and self-absorbed. Whatever she knew, her mind was too much occupied to take any notice of the people in her way. She had walked far, and she had far to walk still. She went on steadily through the midst of them without a pause, looking neither to the right nor the left. There was a tragic directness in the very way she moved, going straight as a bird flies, at least as straight as the houses permitted, minding no windings of the road. The people in front of her stood back and whispered; the people behind closed upon her path. Did she know? Would she have had the fortitude to come walking down here all this long way had she known? Was she going to Stanton, where *they* were? Last of all, timidly, the people said among themselves, "Should not some one tell her?—some one should speak to her;" but by this time she had passed through the village, and they all felt with a sensation of relief that it was too late.

Elizabeth walked on steadily along the water-side. It was a long way that she had still before her. She was going all the way down the water to Sir Henry Stanton's, as Mrs. Pennithorne had gone the day before. The walk was nothing to her, and the long silence of it was grateful to her mind. She knew nothing of what had happened on the other side of the lake. Up in her little house among the hills, all alone in the strange cessation of work, the dead leisure which seemed to have fallen upon her, she had thought of everything till her head and her heart ached alike. Everything now seemed to have gone wrong. Her daughter dead in exile, and her daughter's husband still a banished man, all for the sake of him who was roaming over the country, a fugitive escaped from her care. The life of her son Dick had been ruined by the same means. And now the cycle of misfortune

• was enlarging. The little boy, who was the heir of the Musgraves, was lost too, because he had no one to protect him—Lily's child; and the other Lily, the little lady whom she felt to be her own representative as well as Lily's, who could tell what would become of her? It seemed to 'Elizabeth that this child was the most precious of all. All the rest had suffered for the sake of her madman; but the second Lily, the little princess, who had sprung from her common stock, nothing must touch. Yet it cannot be said that it was for Lily's sake that she made up her mind at last; it was nothing so simple, it was a combination and complication of many motives. He was gone out of her hands who had been for years the absorbing occupation of her life. Dick was after him, it was true; but if Dick failed, how was he to be got without public help? and that help could not be given until the whole story was told. Then her own loneliness wrought upon her, and all the whispers and echoes that circled about the cottage, when he was not there. Her son, ill-fated companion, the ruin of all who had any connection with him, absorbed her so much in general, that she had no time to survey the surroundings and think of all that was, and had been, and might be. Was it he after all that was the cause of all the suffering? What did he know of it? The story of Lily and of John Musgrave was a blank to him. He knew nothing of what they had suffered, was innocent of it in reality. Had he known, would he not have given himself up a hundred times rather than the innocent should suffer for him? Was it he, then, or his mother, who was the cause of all? Several times, during their long agony, such thoughts had overwhelmed 'Elizabeth's mind. They had come over her in full force when the children came to the Castle, and then it was that she had been brought to the length of revealing her secret to young Lord Stanton. Now everything was desperate about her; the little boy lost, the madman himself lost; no telling at any moment what misery and horror might come next. She thought this over day after day as the time passed, and no news came; waiting in the great loneliness, with her doors all open, that he might come in if some new impulse, or some touch of use and wont, should lead him back, her ears intent to hear every sound; her mind prepared

(she thought) for anything ; fresh violence, perhaps violence to himself; miserable death, terrible discovery. She thought she heard his wild whoops and cries every time the wind raved among the hills ; if a mountain stream rushed down a little quicker than usual, swollen by the rain, over its pebbles, she thought it was his hurrying steps. It was always of him that her thoughts were, not of her other son who was pursuing the madman all about, subject to the same accidents, and who might perhaps be his victim instead of his captor. She never thought of that. But she was driven at last to a supreme resolution. Nobody could doubt his madness, could think it was a feint put on to escape punishment, now. And God, who was angry, might be propitiated if at last she made Him, though unwillingly, this sacrifice, this homage to justice and truth. This was the idea which finally prevailed in her mind. She would go and tell her story, and perhaps an angry God would accept, and restore the wanderer to her. If he were safe, safe even in prison, in some asylum, it would be better at least than his wild career of madness among all the dangers of the hills. She had risen in the morning from her uneasy bed, where she lay half-dressed, always watching, listening to every sound, with this determination upon her. She would propitiate God. She would do this thing she ought to have done so long ago. She did not deny that she ought to have done it, and now certainly she would do it, and God would be satisfied, and the tide of fate would turn.

All this struggle had not been without leaving traces upon her. Her ruddy colour, the colour of exposure as well as of health and vigour, was not altogether gone, but she was more brown than ruddy, and this partial paleness and the extreme gravity of her countenance added to the stately aspect she bore. She might have been a peasant-queen, as she moved along with her steady, long, swinging footstep, able for any exertion, above fatigue or common weakness. A mile or two more or less, what did that matter ? It did not occur to her to go to Mr. Pennithorne, though he was nearer, with her story. She went straight to Sir Henry Stanton. He had a family right to be the avenger of blood. It would be all the compensation that could be made to the Stantons, as well as a sacrifice propitiating God. And now

•that she had made up her mind there was no detail from which she shrank. 'Lizabeth never remarked the pitying and wondering looks which were cast upon her. She went on straight to her end with a sense of the solemnity and importance of her mission, which perhaps gave her a certain support. It was no light thing that she was about to do. That there was a certain commotion and agitation about Elfdale did not strike her in the excited state of her mind. It was natural that agitation should accompany her wherever she went. It harmonized with her mood, and seemed to her (unconsciously) a homage and respectful adhesion of nature to what she was about to do.

The great door was open, the hall empty, the way all clear to the room in which Sir Henry held his little court of justice. 'Lizabeth had come by instinct to the great hall door—a woman with such a tragical object does not steal in behind-backs or enter like one of the unconsidered poor. She went in unchallenged, seeing nobody except one of the girls, who peeped out from a door, and retreated again at sight of her. 'Lizabeth saw nothing strange in all this. She went in, more majestically, more slowly than ever, like a woman in a procession—a woman marching to the stake. What stake, what burning could be so terrible? Two of the county police were at the open door; they looked at her with wondering awe, and let her pass. What could any one say to her? An army would have let her pass—*the mother!*—for they knew, though she did not know. 'Lizabeth saw but vaguely a number of people in the room—so much the better; let all hear who would hear. It would be so much the greater propitiation to an outraged heaven. She came in with a kind of dumb state about her, everybody giving way before her. “The mother!” they all said to each other with dismay, yet excitement. Some one brought her a chair with anxious and pitying looks. She put it away with a wave of her hand, yet made a little curtsey of acknowledgment in old-fashioned politeness. It never occurred to her mind to inquire why she was received with such obsequious attention. She advanced to the table at which Sir Henry sat. He too looked pityingly, kindly at her, not like his usual severity. God had prepared everything for her atonement—was it not an earnest of

its acceptance that He should thus have put every obstacle out of her way ?

" Sir Henry Stanton," she said, " I've come to make you acquaint with a story that all the country should have heard long ago. I've not had the courage to tell it till this moment when the Lord has given me strength. Bid them take pen and paper and put it all down in hand of write, and I'll set my name to it. It's to clear them that are innocent that I've come to speak, and to let it be known who was guilty ; but it wasna him that was guilty—it wasna him—but the madness in him," she said, her voice breaking for a moment. " My poor distracted lad ! "

" Give her a seat," said Sir Henry. " My poor woman, if you have any information to give about this terrible event——"

" Ay, I have information—plenty information. Nay, I want no seat. I'm standing as if I was at the judgment-seat of God ; there's where I've stood this many a year, and been judged, but aye held fast. What is man, a worm, to strive with his Maker ? —but me, I've done that, that am but a woman. I humbly crave the Almighty's pardon, and I've made up my mind to do justice now—at the last."

The people about looked at each other, questioning one another what it was, all but two, who knew what she meant. Young Lord Stanton, who was close to the table, looked across at a tall stranger behind, by whom the village constable was standing, and who replied to Geoff's look by a melancholy half-smile. The others looked at each other, and 'Lizabeth, though she saw no one, saw this wave of meaning, and felt it natural too.

" Ay," she said, " you may wonder ; and you'll wonder more before all's done. I am a woman that was the mother of three ; bonny bairns—though I say it that ought not ; ye might have ranged the country from Carlisle to London town, and not found their like. My Lily was the beauty of the whole water ; up or down, there was not one that you would look at when my lass was by. What need I speak ? You all know that as well as me."

The swell of pride in her as she spoke filled the whole company with a thrill of admiration and wonder, like some great actress disclosing the greatness of impassioned nature in the simplest

words. She was old, but she was beautiful too. She looked round upon them with the air of a dethroned empress, from whom the recollection of her imperial state could never depart. Rachel could not have done it, nor perhaps any other of her profession. There was the sweetness of remembered triumph in the midst of the most tragic depths; a gleam of pride and pleasure out of the background of shame and pain.

"Ah! that's all gone and past," she went on with a sigh. "My eldest lad was more than handsome, he was a genius as well. He was taken away from me when he was but a little lad—and never came home again till—till the devil got hold of him, and made him think shame of his poor mother, and the poor place he was born in. I would never have blamed him. I would have had him hold his head with the highest, as he had a right—for had he not gotten that place for himself?—but when he came back to the water-side a great gentleman and scholar, and would never have let on where he belonged to, one that is not here to bear the blame," said 'Lizabeth, setting her teeth—"one that is gone to his account—and well I wot the Almighty has punished him for his ill deeds—betrayed my lad. Some of the gentry were good to him—as good as the angels in heaven—but some were as devils, that being their nature. And this is what I've got to say:" here she made a pause, raised herself to her full height, and threw off the red kerchief from her head in her agitation. "I've come here to accuse before God, and you, Sir Henry, my son, Abel Bampfylde; him I was most proud of and loved best, of the murder of young Lord Stanton, which took place on the morning of the 2nd of August, eighteen hundred and forty-five—fifteen years ago and more."

The sensation that followed is indescribable. Sir Henry Stanton himself rose from his seat, excited by wonder, horror, and pity, beyond all ordinary rule. The bystanders had but a vague sense of the extraordinary revelation she made, so much were they moved by the more extraordinary passion in her, and the position in which she stood. "My good woman, my poor woman!" he cried, "this last dreadful tragedy has gone to your brain—and no wonder. You don't know what you say."

She smiled—mournfully enough, but still it was a smile—and

shook her head. "If you had said it as often to yourself as I have done—night and day—night and day; open me when I'm dead, and you'll find it here," she cried—all unaware that this same language of passion had been used before—and pressing her hand upon her breast. "The second of August, eighteen hundred and forty-five—if you had said it over as often as me!"

There was a whisper all about, and the lawyer of the district, who acted as Sir Henry's clerk on important occasions, stooped towards him and said something. "The date is right. Yes, yes, I know the date is right," Sir Henry said, half-angrily. Then added, "There must be insanity in the family. What more like the effort of a diseased imagination than to link the old crime of fifteen years ago with what has happened to-day?"

"Is it me that you call insane?" said 'Elizabeth. "Eh, if it was but me! But well I know what I'm saying." Then the wild looks of all around her suddenly impressed the old woman, too much occupied hitherto to think what their looks meant. She turned round upon them with slowly awakening anxiety. "You're looking strange at me," she cried, "you're all looking strange at me! What is this you're saying that has happened to-day? Oh, my lad is mad!—he's roaming the hills, and Dick after him; he does na know that he's doing; he's out of his senses; it's no ill meaning. Lads, some of you tell me, I'm going distracted. What has happened to-day?"

The change in her appearance was wonderful; her solemn stateliness and abstraction were gone. Here was something she did not know. The flush of anxiety came to her cheeks, her eyes contracted, her lips fell apart.

"Tell me," she said, "for the love of God!"

No one moved. They looked at each other with pale, alarmed faces. How could they tell her? Geoff stepped forward and took her by the arm very gently. "Will you come with me?" he said. "Something has happened; something that will grieve you deeply. I—I promised Dick to tell you, but not here. Won't you come with me?"

She drew herself out of his grasp with some impatience. "There's been some new trouble," she said to herself—"some new trouble! No doubt more violence. Oh, God, forgive him;

but he does not know what he's doing. It's you, my young lord?—you know it's true what I've been saying. But this new trouble, what is it?—more blood? Oh, tell me the worst; I can bear it all, say, even if he was dead."

"Elizabeth," said Geoff, with tears in his eyes—and again everybody looked on as at a tragedy—"you are a brave woman; you have borne a great deal in your life. He is dead; but that is not all."

She did not note, nor perhaps hear, the last words. How should she? The first was enough. She stood still in the midst of them, all gazing at her, with her hands clasped before her. For a moment she said nothing. The last drop of blood seemed to ebb from her brown cheeks. Then she raised her face upward, with a smile upon it. "The Lord God be praised," she said; "He's taken my lad before me."

And when they brought to her the seat she had rejected, Elizabeth allowed herself to be placed upon it. The extreme tension of both body and mind seemed to have relaxed. The look of tragic endurance left her face. A softened aspect of suffering, a kind of faint smile, like a wan sunbeam, stole over it. The moisture came to her strained eyes. "Gone? Is he gone at last? On the hill-side was it?—in some wild corner, where none but God could be near, not his mother? And me that was dreading and dreading I would be taken first; for who would have patience like his mother? But after all, you know, neighbours, the father comes foremost; and had more to do with him—more to do with him—than even me."

"Take her away, Geoff," said Sir Henry. The men were all overcome with this scene, and with the knowledge of what remained to be told. Sir Henry was not easily moved, but there was something even in *his* throat which choked him. He could not bear it, though it was nothing to him. "Geoff, this is not a place to tell her all you have got to tell. Take her away—take her—to Lady Stanton."

"Nay, nay," she said; "it's my deathdoom, but it's not like other sorrow—I know well what grief is—when I heard for certain my Lily was dead and gone, and me never to see her more. But this is not the same; it's my death, but I cannot

call it sorrow ; not like the loss of a son. I'm glad too, if you understand that. Poor lad !—my Abel ! Ay, ay ; you'll not tell me but what God understands, and is more pitiful of His handiwork, say than the like of you or me."

"Come with me," said Geoff, taking her by the arm. "Come, and I will tell you everything, my poor 'Lizabeth. You know you have a friend in me."

"Ay, my young lord ; but first let them write down what I've said, and let me put my name to it. All the more because he's dead and gone this day."

"Everything shall be done as you wish," said Geoff anxiously ; "but come with me—come with me—my poor woman ; this is not a place for you."

"No," she said—she would not rise from her seat. She turned round to the table where Sir Henry and his clerk sat. "I must end my work now it's begun—I've another son, my kind gentlemen, and he will never forgive me if I do not end my work. Write it out and let me sign. I have but my Dick to think of now."

A thrill of horror ran through the little assembly : to tell her that he too was gone, who would dare to do it ? John Musgrave, whom she had not seen, stood behind, and covered his face with his hands. Sir Henry, for all his steady nerves and unsympathetic mind, fell back in his chair with a low groan. Only young Geoff, his features all quivering, the tears in his eyes, stood by her side.

"Humour her," he said. "Let her have her own way. None of us at this moment surely could refuse her her way."

The lawyer nodded. He had a heart of flesh and not of stone ; and 'Lizabeth sat and waited, with her hands clasped together, her head a little raised, her countenance beyond the power of painting. Grief and joy mingled in it, and relief and anguish. Her eyes were dilated and wet, but she shed no tears ; their very orbits seemed enlarged, and there was a quivering smile upon her mouth—a smile such as makes spectators weep. "Here I and sorrow sit." There was never a king worthy the name but would have felt his state as nothing in this presence. But there was no struggle in her now. She had yielded, and all was peace

about her. She would have waited for days had it been necessary. That what she had begun should be ended was the one thing above all.

A man came hurriedly in as all the people present waited round, breathless and reverential, for the completion of her testimony. Their business, whatever it was, was arrested by force of nature. The kind old Dogberry from the village, who had been standing by John Musgrave's side by way of guarding him, put up his hand to his forehead and made a rustic bow to his supposed prisoner. "I always knowed that was how it would turn out," he said, as he hobbled off, to which John Musgrave replied only by a faint smile, but stood still, as motionless as a picture, though all semblance of restraint had melted away. But while all waited thus reverentially a sudden messenger came rushing in, and addressing Sir Henry in a loud voice, announced that the coroner had sent him to make preparations for the inquest. "And he wants to know what time it will be most convenient for the jury to inspect the two bodies; and if they are both in the same place; and if it's true."

There was a universal hush, at which the man stopped in amazement. Then his eye, guided by the looks of the others, fell upon the old woman in the chair. She had heard him, and she was roused. Her face turned towards him with a growing wonder. "She here! O Lord, forgive me!" he cried, and fell back.

"Two bodies!" she said. A shudder came over her. She got up slowly from her seat and looked round upon them all. "Two—another, another!—oh, my unhappy lad!" She wrung her hands and looked round upon them, "Maybe another house made desolate; maybe another woman—Will you tell me who the other was?"

Here the labouring man, who had been with Wild Bampfylde on the hill-side, and who was standing by, suddenly succumbed to the strange horror and anguish of the moment. He burst out loudly into tears, crying like a child. "Oh, poor 'Lizabeth, poor 'Lizabeth!" he cried; he could not bear any more.

'Lizabeth looked at this man with the air of one awakening from a dream. Then she turned a look of inquiry upon those

around her. No one would meet her eye. They shrank one behind another away from her, and more than one man burst forth into momentary weeping like the first, and some covered their faces in their hands. Even Geoff, sobbing like a child, turned away from her for a moment. She held out her hands to them with a pitiful cry, "Say it's not that—say it's not that!" she cried. The shrill scream of anguish ran through the house. It brought Lady Stanton and all the women shuddering from every corner. They all knew what it was and how it was. The mother! What more needed to be said? They came in and surrounded her, the frivolous girls and the rough women from the kitchen, all together, while the men stood about looking on. Not even Sir Henry could resist the passion of horror and sorrow which had taken possession of the place. He cried with a voice all hoarse and trembling, "Take her away!—take her away!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TRAGEDY ENDS.

'LIZABETH BAMPFYLDE went on to Stanton that same afternoon, where the remains of her two sons were lying. But she would not go in Lady Stanton's carriage.

"Nay, nay; carriages were never made for me. I will walk, my lady. It's best for me, body and soul."

She had recovered herself after the anguish of that discovery. Before the sympathisers round her had ceased to sob, 'Lizabeth had raised herself up in the midst of them like an old tower. The storm had raged round her, but had not crushed her. Her face and even her lips had lost all trace of colour, her eyes were hollow and widened out in their sockets, like caves to hold the slow welling out of salt tears. There was a convulsive trembling now in the pose of her fine head, and in her hands; but her strength was not touched.

“Oh, how can you walk?” Lady Stanton said; “you are not able for it.”

“I am able for anything it’s God’s pleasure to send,” she said; “though it’s little even He can do to me now.” The women stood round her with pitiful looks, some of them weeping unrestrainedly; but the tears that ’Lizabeth shed came one by one, slow gathering, rarely falling. She put on her red handkerchief over her cap again, with hands that were steady enough till that twitch of nervous movement took them. “It should be black,” she said, with a half-smile; “ay, I should be a’ black from head to foot, from head to foot, if there was one left to mind.” Then she turned upon them with again her little stately curtsey. I’m not a woman of many words, and ye may judge what heart I have to speak; but I thank ye all,” and, with once more a kind of smile, she set out upon her way.

John Musgrave had been standing by; he had spoken to no one, not even to Lady Stanton, who, trembling with a consciousness that he was there, had not been able, in the presence of this great anguish, to think of any other. He, and his story, and his return, altogether had been thrown entirely into the background by these other events. He came forward now, and followed ’Lizabeth out of the gate. “I am going with you,” he said. The name “mother” was on his lips, but he dared not say it. She gave a slight glance at him, and recognised him. But if one had descended from heaven to accompany her, what would that have been to ’Lizabeth? It was as if they had parted yesterday.

“Ay,” she said; then, after a pause, “it’s you that has the best right.”

The tragedy had closed very shortly after that penultimate chapter which ended with the death of Wild Bampfylde. When the carriage and its attendants arrived to remove him to Stanton he was lying on Geoffi’s shoulder, struggling for his last breath. It was too late then to disturb the agony. The men stood about reverentially till the last gasp was over, then carried the vagrant tenderly to the foot of the hill, with a respect which no one had ever shown him before. One of the party, a straggler, who had strayed further up the dell in the interval of waiting, saw traces

above among the broken bushes, which made him call some of his comrades as soon as their first duty was done. And there on the little plateau, where Walter Stanton's body had been found fifteen years before, lay that of his murderer, the madman who had wrought so much misery. He was found lying across the stream as if he had stooped to drink, and had not been able to raise himself. The running water had washed all traces of murder from him. When they lifted him, with much precaution, not knowing whether his stillness might mean a temporary swoon, or a feint of madness to beguile them, his pale marble countenance seemed a reproach to the lookers-on. Even with the aspect of his victim fresh in their eyes, the men could not believe that this had ever been a furious maniac or manslayer. One of them went to look for Geoff, and to arrest the progress of the other funeral procession. "There's another one, my lord," he said, "all torn and tattered in his clothes, but with the look of a king." And Geoff, notwithstanding his horror, could not but look with a certain awe upon the worn countenance. It might have been that of a man worn with great labours, with thought, with the high musings of philosophy, or schemes of statesmanship. He was carried down and laid by the side of his brother whom he had killed. All the cottagers, the men from the field, the passengers on the way, stood looking on, or followed the strange procession. Such a piece of news, as may be supposed, flew over the country like wildfire. There was no family better known than the Bampfyldes, notwithstanding their humble rank. The handsome Bampfyldes : and here they had come to an end !

Old 'Elizabeth, as she made her way to Stanton, was followed everywhere by the same atmosphere of sympathy. The women came out to their doors to look after her, and even strong men sobbed as she passed. What would become of her, poor lonely woman ? She gave a great cry when she saw the two pale faces lying peacefully together. They were both men in the full prime of life, in the gravity of middle age, fully developed, strongly knit, men all formed for life, and full of its matured vigour. They lay side by side as they had lain when they were children. That one of them had taken the life of the other, who could have imagined possible ? The poacher and vagrant looked like some

great general nobly dead in battle, the madman like a sage. Death had redeemed them from their misery, their poverty, the misfortunes which were greater than either. Their mother gave a great cry of anguish yet pride as she stood beside them. "My lads," she cried, "my two handsome lads, my bonny boys!" 'Elizabeth had come to that pass when words have no meaning to express the depths and the heights. What could a woman say who sees her sons stretched dead before her? She uttered one inarticulate wail of anguish, as a dumb creature might have done, and then her overwrought soul reeling, tottered almost on the verge of reason, and she cried out in pride and agony, "My handsome lads! my bonny boys!"

"Come home with me," said John Musgrave. "We have made a bad business of it, 'Elizabeth, you and I. This is all our sacrifice has come to. Nothing left but your wreck of life, and mine. But come home with me. Where I am, there will always be a place for Lily's mother. And there is little Lily still, and she will comfort you——"

"Eh! comfort me!" She smiled at the word. "Nay, I must go to my own house. I thank you, John Musgrave, and I do not deserve it at your hand. This fifteen years it has been me that has murdered you, not my lad yonder, not my Abel. What did he know? And I humbly beg your pardon, and your little bairns' pardon, on my knees—but nay, nay, I must go home. My own house—there is no other place for me."

They came round her and took her hands, and pleaded with her too—Geoff, and his mother, with the tears streaming from her eyes. "Oh, my poor woman, my poor woman!" Lady Stanton cried, "stay here while *they* are here." But nothing moved 'Elizabeth. She made her little curtsey to them all, with that strange smile like a pale light wavering upon her face.

"Nay, nay," she said. "Nay, nay—I humbly thank my lady and my lord, and a' kind friends—but my own house, that is the only place for me."

"But you cannot go so far, if that were all. You must be worn out with walking only—if there was nothing more——"

"Me—worn out!—with walking!" It was a kind of laugh which came from her dry throat. "Ay, very near—very near it

—that will come soon, if the Lord pleases. But good-day to you all, and my humble thanks, my lord and my lady—you're kind—kind to give them house-room ; till Friday ; but they'll give no trouble, no trouble ! ” she said, with again that something which sounded like a laugh. Laughing or crying, it was all one to 'Lizabeth. The common modes of expression were garments too small for her soul.

“Stay only to-night—it will be dark long before you can be there. Stay to-night,” they pleaded. She broke from them with a cry.

“I canna bide this, I canna bide it ! I'm wanting the stillness of the fells, and the arms of them about me. Let me be—oh, let me be ! There's a moon,” she added, abruptly, “and dark or light, I'll never lose my way.”

Thus they had to leave her to do as she pleased in the end. She would not eat anything, or even sit down, but went out with her hood over her head into the gathering shadows. They stood watching her till the sound of her steps died out on the way—firm, steady, unfaltering steps. Life and death, and mortal anguish, and wearing care, had done their worst upon old 'Lizabeth. She stood like a rock against them all.

She came down to the funeral on Friday, as she had herself appointed, and saw her sons laid in their grave, and again she was entreated to remain. But even little Lilias, whom her father brought forward to aid the pleadings of the others, could not move her. “Honey-sweet ! ” she said, with a tender light in her eyes ; but she had more room for the children when her heart was full of living cares. It was empty now, and there was no room. A few weeks after, she was found dying peaceably in her bed, giving all kinds of directions to her children. Abel will have your father's watch, he aye wanted it from a baby—and Lily gets all my things, as is befitting. They will set her up for her wedding. And Dick, my little Dick, that has aye been the little one—who says I was not thinking of Dick ? He's been my prop and my right hand when a' deserted me. The poor little house and the little bit of land, and a' his mother has—who should they be for, but Dick ? ” Thus she died tranquilly, seeing them all round her ; and all that was cruel and bitter in the lot of the Bampfylde's came to an end.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

JOHN MUSGRAVE settled down without any commotion into his natural place in his father's house. The old Squire himself mended from the day when Nello, very timid, but yet brave to repress the signs of his reluctance, was brought into his room. He played with the child as if he had been a child himself, and so grew better day by day, and got out of bed again, and save for a little dragging of one leg as he limped along, brought no external sign of his "stroke" out of his sick-room. But he wrote no more Monographs, studied no more. His life had come back to him as the Syrian lord in the Bible got back his health after his leprosy — "like the flesh of a little child." The Squire recovered after a while the power of taking his part in a conversation, and looked more venerable than ever with his faded colour and subdued forces. But his real life was all with little Nello, who by and by got quite used to his grandfather, and lorded it over him as children so often do. When the next summer came, they went out together, the Squire generally in a wheeled chair, Nello walking, or riding by his side on the pony his grandpapa had given him. There was no doubt now as to who was heir. When Randolph came to Penninghame, after spending a day and a half in vain researches for Nello, life having become too exciting at that moment at the Castle to leave any one free to send word of the children's safety—he found all doubt and notion of danger over for John—and he himself established in his natural place. Whether the Squire had forgotten everything in his illness, or whether he had understood the story which Mary took care to repeat two or three times very distinctly by his bedside, no one knew. But he never objected to John's presence, made no question about him—accepted him as if he had been always there. Absolutely as if there had been no breach in the household existence at all, the eldest son took his place; and that Nello was the heir was a thing beyond doubt in any reasonable mind. This actual settlement of all difficulties had

already come about when Randolph came. His father took no notice of him, and John, who thought it was his brother's fault that his little son had been so unkindly treated, found it difficult to afford Randolph any welcome. He did not, however, want any welcome in such circumstances. He stayed for a single night, feeling himself coldly looked upon by all. Mr. Pen, who spent half his time at the Castle, more than any one turned a cold shoulder upon his brother clergyman.

"You felt it necessary that the child should go to school quite as much as I did," Randolph said, on the solitary occasion when the matter was discussed.

"Yes, but not to any school," the Vicar said. "I would rather——" he paused for a sufficiently strong image, but it was hard to find; "I would rather—have got up at six o'clock every day, and sacrificed everything—rather than have exposed Nello to the life he had there;—and you who are a father yourself."

"Yes; but my boy has neither a girl's name nor a girl's want of courage. He is not a baby that would flinch at the first rough word. I did not know the nature of the thing," said Randolph, with a sneer. "I have no acquaintance with any but straightforward and manly ways."

The Vicar followed him out in righteous wrath. He produced from his pocket a hideous piece of pink paper.

"Do you know who sent this?" he asked.

Randolph looked at it, taken aback, and tried to bluster forth an expression of wonder—

"I—how should I know?"

"What did you mean by it?" cried the gentle Vicar, in high excitement;—"did you think I did not know my duty? did you think I was a cold-blooded reptile like—like the man that sent that? Do you think it was in me to betray my brother? I know nothing bad enough for him who made such a suggestion. And he nearly gained his point. The devil knows what tools to work with. He works with the weakness of good people as well as with the strength of bad," cried mild Mr. Pen, inspired for once in his life with righteous indignation. "Judas did it himself at least, bad as he was. He did not whisper treason in a man's ears nor in a woman's heart."

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Randolph, with guilt in his face.

“Not all, no ; fortunately you don’t know, nor any one else, the trouble you might have made. But no less, though it never came to pass, was it that traitor’s fault.”

“When you take to speaking riddles I give it up,” said Randolph, shrugging his shoulders.

But Mr. Pen was so hot in moral force that he was glad to get away. He slept one night under his father’s roof, no one giving him much attention, and then went away, never to return again ; but went back to his believing wife, too good a fate, who smoothed him down and healed all his wounds. “My husband is like most people who struggle to do their duty,” she said. “His brother was very ungrateful, though Randolph had done so much for him. And the little boy, who had been dreadfully spoiled, ran away from the school when he had cost my husband so much trouble. And even his sister Mary showed him no kindness ; that is the way when a man is so disinterested as Randolph, doing all he can for his own family, for their *real* good.”

And this, at the end, came to be what Randolph himself thought.

Mrs. Pen, after coming home hysterical from Elfdale, made a clean breast to her husband, and showed him the telegram, and confessed all her apprehensions for him. What could a man do but forgive the folly or even wickedness done for his sweet sake ? And Mrs. Pen went through a few dreadful hours, when in the morning John Musgrave came back from his night journey and the warrant was put in force. If they should hang him what would become of her ? She always believed afterwards that it was her William’s intervention which had saved John, and she never believed in John’s innocence, let her husband say what he would. For Mrs. Pen said wisely, that wherever there is smoke there must be fire, and it was no use telling her that Lord Stanton had not been killed ; for it was in the last edition of the *Fellside History*, and therefore must be true.

When all was over Sir Henry and Lady Stanton made a formal visit of congratulation at Penninghame. Sir Henry told

John that it had been a painful necessity to issue the warrant, but that a man must do his duty, whatever it is ; and as, under Providence, this was the means of making everything clear he could not regret that he had done it now. Lady Stanton said nothing, or next to nothing. She talked a little to Mary, making stray little remarks about the children, and drawing Nello to her side. Lilias she was afraid of, with those great eyes. Was that child to be Geoff's wife ? she thought. Ah ! how much better, had he been the kind young husband who should have delivered her own Annie or Fanny. This little girl would want nothing of the kind ; her father would watch over her, he would let no one meddle with her, not like a poor woman with a hard husband and stepdaughters. She trembled a little when she put her hand into John's. She looked at him with moisture in her eyes.

"I have always believed in you, always hoped to see you here again," she said.

"Come, Mary, the carriage is waiting," said Sir Henry. He said after that this was all that was called for, and here the intercourse between the two houses dropped. Mary could not help "taking an interest" in John Musgrave still, but what did it matter ? everybody took an interest in him now.

As for Geoff, he became, as he had a way of doing, the sun of the house at Penninghame ; even the old Squire took notice of his kind, cheerful young face. He neglected Elfdale and his young cousins, and even Cousin Mary, whom he loved. But it was not to be supposed that John Musgrave would allow a series of love passages to go on indefinitely for years between his young neighbour and his daughter Lilias, as yet not quite thirteen years old. The young man was sent away after a most affecting parting, not to return for three years. Naturally, Lady Stanton rebelled much, she who had kept her son at home during all his life ; but what could she do ? Instead of struggling vainly she took the wiser part, and though it was a trial to tear herself from Stanton and all the servants, who were so kind, and the household which went upon wheels, upon velvet, and gave her no trouble, she made up her mind to it, and took her maid and Benson and Mr. Tritton and went

•“abroad” too. What is it to go abroad when a lady is middle-aged and has a grown-up son and such an establishment?—but she did it: “for I shall not have him very long!” she said, with a sigh.

Lilias was sixteen when Geoff came home. Can any one doubt that the child had grown up with her mind full of the young hero who had acted so great a part in her young life? When the old Squire died and Nello went to school, a very different school from Mr. Swan’s, the idea of “Mr. Geoff” became more and more her companion. It was not love, perhaps, in the ordinary meaning of the word; Lilias did not know what that meant. Half an elder brother, half an enchanted prince, more than half a hero of romance, he wove himself with every story and every poem that was written, to Lilias. He it was, and no Prince Ferdinand, whom Miranda thought so fair. It was he who slew all the dragons and giants, and delivered whole dungeons full of prisoners. Her girlhood was somewhat lonely, chiefly because of this soft mist of semi-betrothal which was about her. Not only was she already a woman, though a child, but a woman separated from others, a bride doubly virginal because he was absent to whom all her thoughts were due. “What if he should forget her?” Mary Musgrave would say, alarmed. She thought it neither safe nor right for the child, who was the beauty and flower of Penninghame, as she herself had been, though in so different a way. Mary now had settled down as the lady of Penninghame, as her brother was its lawful lord. John was not the kind of man to make a second marriage, even if, as his sister sometimes fancied, his first had but little satisfied his heart. But of this he said nothing, thankful to be able at the end to redeem some portion of the life thus swallowed up by one of those terrible, but happily rare, mistakes, which are no less wretched that they are half divine. He had all he wanted in his sister’s faithful companionship and in his children. There is no more attractive household than that in which, after the storms of life, a brother and sister set up peacefully together the old household gods, never dispersed, which were those of their youth. Mary was a little more careful, perhaps, of her niece, a little more afraid of

the troubles in her way, than if she had been her daughter. She watched Lilius with great anxiety, and read between the lines of Geoff's letters with vague scrutiny, looking always for indications of some change.

Lilius was sixteen in the end of October, the third after the previous events recorded here. She had grown to her full height, and her beauty had a dreamy, poetical touch from the circumstances, which greatly changed the natural expression appropriate to the liquid dark eyes and noble features she had from her mother and her mother's mother. Her eyes were less brilliant than they would have been had they not looked so far away, but they were more sweet. Her brightness altogether was tempered and softened, and kept within that modesty of childhood to which her youthful age really belonged, though nature and life had developed her more than her years. Though she was grown up she kept many of her childish ways, and still sat, as Mary had always done, at the door of the old hall, now wonderfully decorated and restored, but yet the old hall still. The two ladies shared it between them for all their hours of leisure, but Mary had given up her seat at the door to the younger inhabitant, partly because she loved to see Lilius there with the sun upon her, partly because she herself began to feel the cool airs of the north less halcyon than of old. The books that Lilius carried with her were no longer fairy tales, but maturer enchantments of poetry. And there she sat absorbed in verse and lost to all meaner delights, on the eve of her birthday, a soft air ruffling the little curls on her forehead, the sun shining upon her uncovered head. Lilius loved the sun. She was not afraid of it nor her complexion, and the sun of October is not dangerous. She had a hand up to shade the book, which was too dazzling in the light, but nothing to keep the golden light from her. She sat warm and glorified in the long, slanting, dazzling rays.

Mary had heard a horse's hoofs, and, being a little restless, came forward softly from her seat behind to see who it was; but Lilius, lost in the poetry and the sunshine, heard nothing.

“She wept with pity and delight,
She blush'd with love and virgin shame,
And like the murmur of a dream
I heard her breathe my name.

“Her bosom heaved, she stepp'd aside
As conscious of my look she stept,
Then suddenly, with timorous eye,
She fled to me and wept.”

Mary saw what Lilius did not see, the horseman at the foot of the slope. He looked and smiled, and signed to her over the lovely head in the sunshine. He was brown and ruddy with health and travel, his eyes shining, his breath coming quick. Three years ! as long as a lifetime—but it was over. Suddenly, “Lily—my little Lily,” he cried, unable to keep silence more.

She sprang to her feet like a startled deer ; the book fell from her hands ; her eyes gave a great gleam and flash, and softened in the golden light of sunset and tenderness. The poetry or the life, which was the most sweet ? “Yes, Mr. Geoff,” she said.

THE END.

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